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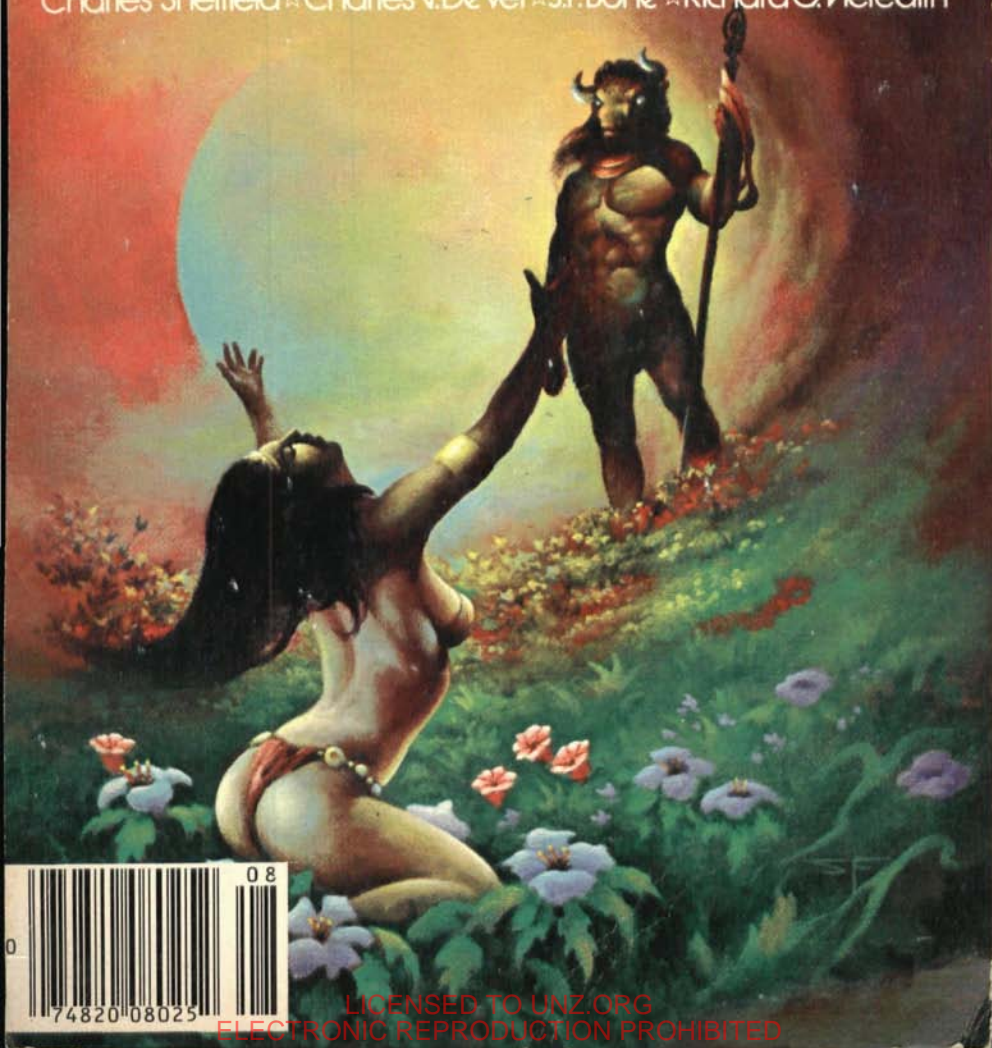
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The Winning of Gloria Grandonwheels by Robert F. Young

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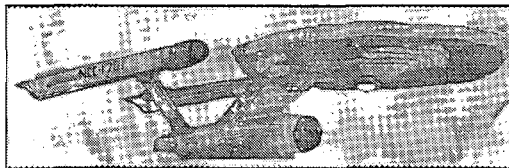
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AUGUST, 1978

Vol. 51, No. 4

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illustrating THE WINNING OF GLORIA GRANDONWHEELS

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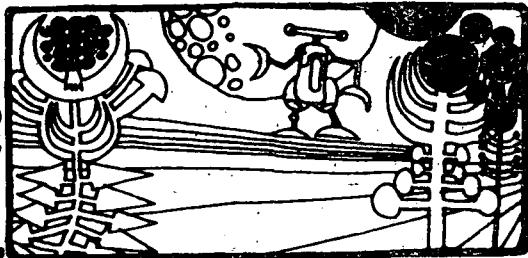
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**TED
WHITE**

EDITORIAL



CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE LATEST KIND: One problem with doing one's own remodelling is that it's so easy to put it off, and a direct consequence of my having put off some shelf-building in my guest room is that my copies of the older, pulp-sized issues of *AMAZING* are still packed away in boxes in my basement. So I can't tell you precisely which issue of *AMAZING* it was in which "flying saucers" were first revealed to the stf-reading public.

I can tell you that Ray Palmer, who was then editor of this magazine, was an early advocate of "flying saucers," a fact he liked to remind his readers about in the pages of his later *Other Worlds*. And I'm reasonably certain that the first "flying saucer" story also appeared in *AMAZING*; Palmer had a fondness for them. But I can't cite chapter and verse; perhaps one of our readers with access to the issues of *AMAZING* dating from 1947 to 1950 will be able to tell us.

I was nine years old in 1947. I heard news stories about the "flying saucers" on the radio—along with a lot of far-fetched theories that attempted to explain them away. One I still recall is that "flying saucers" were actually cola bottle tops thrown out of planes flying overhead.

In the same post-war era the freshest shape in airplanes was the Flying Wing, a giant craft whose entire body was a wing-like airfoil. At the time I assumed there might—must!—be a connection between the Flying Wing and Flying Saucers. I assumed the

news would come out reasonably soon.

I was wrong, of course.

As I grew up the "flying saucers" remained enigmatic mysteries. When I was thirteen Gold Medal Books published a book by Donald Kehoe on "flying saucers," which made convincing reading to a young science fiction fan. Yet I wavered, ambivalent in my feelings about these things.

It was one thing to believe—as I did then and still do—in the abstract concept of Other Life in the universe; it was quite another thing to believe that "flying saucers" were evidence of visitations by alien life forms. I *wanted* to believe that, but I remained unwillingly sceptical. It was one thing to hear reports (second-, third- or fourth-hand at best) about little green men four feet tall and flying objects which could reverse directions abuptly with apparent disregard for the Known Laws of Physics, but I wanted something concrete, something real in the way of proof or evidence. Pictures would do.

And there *were* pictures. Most of them turned out to be fakes. It's easy to fake an out-of-focus flying saucer. One was a bathtub stopper.

At the same time, it was hard to believe the way the Air Force pooh-poohed all reports. "Swamp gas" became a joke. The government seemed, if not to be actually hiding something, biased against the entire thing.

(Continued on page 24)

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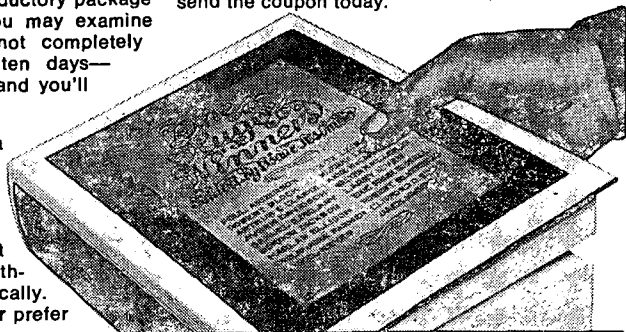
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Of what importance is a Soul, when considering—

THE WINNING OF GLORIA GRANDONWHEELS

ROBERT F. YOUNG

WHEN Bill Harding boarded the *Galactic Queen's* shuttle boat he hadn't the faintest inkling that another passenger for Weighstation—a female of the species, no less—had already preceded him, or that she and he were destined to share an adventure the like of which neither had ever dreamed.

She had frost-bitten blue eyes, midnight-nipped black hair, and Roman Empress features with *rich bitch* showing in their every line. She was built like a brick Betelgeuse vi fitzenframmerhouse.

Having seated herself comfortably on one of the two face-to-face couches, she was gazing into the floorscreen, awaiting the moment when the orbiting *Queen's* ventral hatch would open sending the shuttleboat spiraling down into the diminutive planet's atmosphere.

Bill Harding had never met her, but he had seen her once or twice on the GQ's promenade deck. The steward had told him her name: Gloria Grandonwheels.

When he sat down opposite her she accorded him a single supercilious glance, then returned her gaze to the floorscreen. A moment later, the shuttleboat pilot entered, sat down at the control panel and threw a pair of

little levers. The ventral hatch opened and the shuttleboat began spiraling planetward like a steamlined Watumbi iv ruk egg. Presently the face of Weighstation appeared in the floorscreen—a singularly gray and austere countenance, its only redeeming feature a green freckle located midway between its Equator and its Tropic of Cancer.

Bill Harding wondered why a rich bitch like Gloria Grandonwheels would want to visit such a place. Except for the green freckle, which constituted the fertile valley where the owner—Wardwalker the Psychectomist—lived with his “spooks” and his memories, the topography was confined to stonestrewn steppes, ice flats, sluggish rivers and dead seas.

Suddenly Bill Harding gasped. Was it possible that she was visiting Weighstation for the same reason he was?

Granted, atavisms were rare, but that didn't mean two of them couldn't be going to Weighstation at the same time and on the same ship. After all, where else could an atavism go to have his soul removed?

He decided to set protocol aside for the moment. It wasn't as though Gloria Grandonwheels was a complete

Illustrated by Steve Fabian



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stranger to him; he *had* seen her before, and they *were* fellow passengers. "Are you on your way to see Wardwalker the Psychectomist too?" he asked.

"Yes," Gloria Grandonwheels answered without raising her eyes from the floorscreen.

"My name's Bill Harding," Bill Harding said. "I'm from Far Out."

She shot him a single ice-blue glance. "Humph," she said, and returned her attention to the floorscreen.

Stung, Bill Harding directed his own gaze toward the floorscreen. Seen at close range, Weighstation was even less inviting than when seen from orbit. The shuttleboat was spiraling swiftly planetward on a course that, presumably, would bring it to rest in the middle of the green valley, but presently Bill Harding realized it wasn't going to come down anywhere near the valley.

He called the matter to the pilot's attention. "You're darn right we're not going to come down anywhere near the valley," the pilot said. "I'm not going near that crazy place! Maybe what I heard about it is true and maybe it isn't, but I'm not taking any chances. I gotta wife 'n kids to consider, and if anything happened to me, who'd take care of them, hah? Who'd pay the rent, who'd buy the groceries, who'd keep the wolf from the door? Who? I ask you—who?"

"Just forget about it, will you?" Bill Harding said. "Just forget about it."

"I'll set her down near that big rock over there. That's pretty close to where you two are going. After all, you can't expect a man with a wife 'n kids to take chances, can you? It says right in our union contract that shuttleboat pilots aren't supposed to take unnecessary risks . . . There,

how's that for a smooth landing? . . . It's not that I'm afraid of that nut and those spooks on my own account, you understand. Why, if it was only my own life I'd be risking I'd set you down right smack down in the middle of that little old valley, spooks or no spooks! But I gotta consider my wife 'n kids. After all, if anything happened to me, who'd—"

Bill Harding picked up his travel-bag and got out. Gloria Grandonwheels picked up hers and followed him. Miffed, the pilot slammed the lock and sent the shuttleboat spiraling back up into the atmosphere.

THE TWO ATAVISMS surveyed their surroundings: Sand . . . More sand . . . Rocks, stones, pebbles . . . Sunlight and shadow . . . Up ahead, a faint flush of green.

A land crab ran out from behind a rock and disappeared behind another. "Ooh!" Gloria Grandonwheels gasped. Remembering how contemptuously she had rebuffed his overture of friendship, Bill Harding ignored her and started walking toward the faint flush of green.

After a while he glanced over his shoulder to see whether she was following him. She was. Closely. So closely, in fact, that he was able to identify the type of mascara she used. It was the kind that was made by grinding up Yogenwort VI swamp-blossom roots with Goose III huckleberry sepals, and it cost a fortune. As an employee of Far Out's leading Cosmetics and Perfumery concern, Bill Harding knew all about such things. Not that, to date, the knowledge had done him much good. Indeed, it was his inability to advance higher in the company ranks that was responsible for his presence on Weighstation. On the advice of the

company psychiatrist he had had a psyche-probe performed, and when it had revealed he had a soul, the company had insisted that he visit a psychectomist at once, or call at the nearest electronic cashier's slot for his severance pay.

Gradually the faint flush of green turned into grass and trees—the former, timothy, the latter, finkoes, hailgoes, maples, sphergoes, wirts, and just about every other species of shade tree Weighstation soil would put up with.

Pausing on the lip of the valley, the two atavisms surveyed Wardwalker's demesne: They saw, first, a green, tree-shaded slope. Then a tree-shaded river effervescing like champagne between verdant mossy banks. Then green geometric fields pied with the brighter hues of perennial fruits and vegetables. Then a park-like forest. Then, in a clearing in the forest, a sprawling building occupying at least two acres and with a lighthouse-like tower thrusting up from its jumbled rooftops. Then more forest; then another river (or a branch of the same one); then another tree-shaded slope; and finally the gray terrain of the interrupted steppe.

They descended the nearer tree-shaded slope side by side and approached the first river. A short distance downstream an ornate footbridge spanned the champagne-like water, and Bill Harding led the way toward it. Several feet from it, he came to an abrupt standstill: stationed before the footbridge, barring the way, was a Weighstationling.

II

NO DOUBT the reader is wondering why Bill Harding didn't see the Weighstationling at the same time he

saw the footbridge, why he virtually had to bump into the creature in order to become aware of its presence. The following excerpt from the new Blunt & Grimes Simplipedia should clear this little matter up, and in the process bring to light other intriguing characteristics of these strange and little-known inhabitants-of Weighstation:

WEIGHSTATIONLING (sub-order 4, gal. *undling*; fossora): A parahumanoid species native to Radhakrishnan IV (q.v.), more commonly known as Weighstation due to its original function as a telemetric weighing station for Class B-IX ore-carriers. Weighstationlings are nearly transparent transprotoplasmic (q.v.) creatures of a high order of intelligence considering their otherwise general inferiority to man (q.v.). Referred to superstitiously by common spacemen as "spooks", these unique beings have a remarkable ability to change their shape, size, consistency and color to fit any situation. Owing to their hypersensitive natures, they are able to anticipate, when accosted, exactly the sort of person, being or thing the accoster unconsciously wishes to see, and due to their pronounced inferiority complexes they are compelled to become this person/being/thing and to supply him/her/it with appropriate words from the accoster's mind. Frequently, when a permanent relationship is established between a Weighstationling and a human (q.v.), it retains the personality it assumes until the relationship is terminated.

Senses alert for the first sign of foul play, Bill Harding approached the

Weighstationling stationed before the footbridge. Behind him, her aristocratic countenance pale but her ice-blue eyes determined, walked Gloria Grandonwheels.

The weighstationling looked like a diaphanous bedsheet someone had left hanging on a nonexistent clothesline and that someone else had riddled with a charge of buckshot. It hovered about two feet above the ground and kept going hummm, hummm, hummin. Halting within half a yard of it, Bill Harding said, "This young lady and myself have traveled many parsecs through space and time in order to visit Wardwalker the Psychec-tomist. So will you step aside, please, and permit us to cross this bridge?"

Instantly the Weighstationling turned into Bill Harding's mother. "Son," she said, "I don't want to butt into your affairs, but don't you think it would be wiser if you gave this matter a little more thought? If, indeed, as certainly would seem to be the case, you do have a soul, you must, of course, eventually have it removed if you are to retain your Job and become a Big Success. But mightn't it be better to live with your affliction a while longer so that you may get to know and understand how Things were in the Old Days when all people had souls and thought they needed them in order to live their lives to the full and attain the Hereafter? And another thing, son—this girl you're running around with. I know that Fate has forced you into her company, but just the same I'd watch myself if I were you. You never can tell about her kind, son—you never can tell!"

"I knew it!" Gloria Grandonwheels exclaimed. "I knew it! I knew it all along!"

"Knew what?" Bill Harding asked.

"That you were an Oedipal regressive psycho-dormital subliminal pananorm. I knew it, I just knew it!" And with a haughty toss of her head Gloria Grandonwheels approached to within a half a yard of the Weighstationling and said, "Well, are you going to get out of my way, or aren't you? Do you think I came all this distance for a psychectomy just to have my way barred at the very last minute by a crummy old bedsheet with moth holes in it?"

Immediately the Weighstationling changed from Bill Harding's mother into a tall spare woman with a wart on the end of her nose. She was clad in a purple nurse's uniform with horizontal cinnamon stripes, and atop her hoary head sat a nurse's helmet labeled MOTHER MACKEY: *Sex Instructress*. "Oh Gloria, Gloria," she cried, "You always were a headstrong girl! It grieves me deeply, after all I've taught you, to find you running around with an Oedipal regressive psycho-dormital subliminal paranormal member of the male species whom you've known for less than half an hour and whom you do not truly know at all. But I suppose your cause is urgent, and that consequently the ordinary precautions a girl should take under such circumstances must be dispensed with. So, reluctantly, I say, Go ahead, child, but watch yourself every single second, and guard your virginity well!"

The Weighstationling changed back into a perforated bedsheet and fluttered to one side. Face flaming like the fire-forests of Bog IX, Gloria Grandonwheels stomped across the bridge. Bill Harding followed.

A POEM could have been written about the fields Bill Harding and Gloria Grandonwheels walked

through that afternoon, about the trees they strolled under and about the Weighstationlings they saw cultivating ever-bearing tomato plants, old-faithful grapevines and constant corn. In point of fact, Bill Harding *did* write a poem—or rather, sketched one in his mind so that at a later date he could jot it down for posterity:

green trees
 givers of nuts
 bedsheets hanging
 on
 non
 existent
 clotheslines
 tomato
 grape
 corn-on-the-cob
 gold
 tree-toad threnody of pre-dusk blues
 becominggggggg
 true
 blue
 true . . .

They came in due course—and without further interference from the Weighstationlings (who, while they changed tentatively to this shape and that whenever the two humans came near them, were too preoccupied with their labors to do a recognizable job)—to the park-like forest that encompassed the sprawling building they had seen from the lip of the valley. Neither had said a word since the footbridge incident, nor was this mutual silence broken till they emerged from the trees into the clearing. They stopped in their tracks then, and Gloria Grandonwheels exclaimed, “Say, he really *must* be a nut!”

Bill Harding was inclined to agree. Seeing the building from afar had been one thing; seeing it up close was another.

Had it been built from the inside out, he wondered, or from the outside in?

He decided that neither method could have been employed, because either presupposed a plan, and the building was a sprawling monument to planlessness. Obviously Wardwalker had built it as he had gone along, adding wings and talls as the need arose. No doubt, he had begun with the lighthouse-like tower, which at the moment was hidden from view by the jumbled rooftops of the rest of the structure.

Almost as incongruous as the building itself was the miscellany of materials it comprised: filkwood from Ottawatta XL, ebonstone from Glik I, permadobe from Lone Star (Regulus XIII), and bluebrick from Rubba Dub-Dub (Dhub XVII), plus numerous other materials Bill Harding couldn't identify.

There were no windows to be seen, but opposite the spot where the two atavisms were standing was a rectangular opening that vaguely resembled a doorway. There were numerous other such openings, but this one appeared to be the most promising. Bill Harding took the lead, and presently he and Gloria Grandonwheels found themselves in a dimly lit corridor that turned first this way and then that. He could smell Gloria Grandonwheels' perfume, so close did she keep behind him. It was the kind that was made by blending the love-sac fluid of the Grumpus XVIII bog-beaver with the purified juice of Lokas XXIII diddleberries.

At length he saw a bright light up ahead, and increased his pace. Gloria Grandonwheels increased hers too, and presently they stepped into a big puddle of late-afternoon sunlight. It was the same puddle they had step-

ped out of scarcely two minutes ago.

"Well I'll be darned," Bill Harding said. "We're right back where we started from!"

"It's a maze—that's why," Gloria Grandonwheels said excitedly. "A labyrinth like the one that used to exist on the island of Crete on Sol Three and that the Minotaur lived in. I—I wonder if there's a Minotaur living in this one."

Bill Harding gave her a disgusted look. "Come on, we'll try again."

III

WHEN Bill Harding entered the strange and eerie building for the second time he did so in the full knowledge that in its weird and winding corridors dangers such as he had never before encountered might very well be lurking in the gloom and that at any moment he might be forced to pit his sinews against unknown terrors such as he had never dreamed of. Cautioning his feminine companion to be quiet and instructing her to keep as close to him as she could, he peered intently ahead into the strange halflight that permeated every nook and cranny of the winding passageway and which had no visible source; then, senses attuned for the slightest movement, sound or smell, he crept fearlessly forward.

At length he came to a branching corridor that he'd apparently missed before. He turned into it, Gloria Grandonwheels right behind him. A third corridor branched out of the second. They turned into that one too. A fourth. After a while, they came to a room. It was a bathroom. They went on. Pretty soon they came to another room. It, too, was a bathroom.

Was it the same one?

Again they went on. The halflight grew dimmer. Suddenly Gloria Grandonwheels whispered, "Do—do you hear something, Bill Harding?"

"Such as what?"

"Such—such as hoofbeats."

Bill Harding halted. He was about to tell her that this was no time for wishfulfillment fantasies and that she probably wouldn't qualify as a victim anyway, when he heard the sound himself: *Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop. Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop.*

They peered ahead of them into the gloom. Abruptly Gloria Grandonwheels gave a start. "Ooh!" she exclaimed.

She spun around. So did Bill Harding. There, sure enough, was the Minotaur. It was laughing. "He-he-he," it laughed. "He-he-he! The acoustics fooled you, didn't they? I knew they would."

It took off its head. Then it took off its hide and its hoofs. Bill Harding and Gloria Grandonwheels saw a smallish man with a gray, goat-like beard who was somewhere in his eighties and maybe even somewhere in his nineties. "He-he-he," he laughed again. "He-he-he!"

Gloria Grandonwheels hauled off and slapped his face. "How dare you sneak up behind me like that and—and— How dare you!"

The old man didn't seem to mind the slap. "Allow me to introduce myself," he said. "I am none other than Wardwalker the Psychectomist. Or perhaps I should say 'ex-psychectomist', it having been my ill fortune while still in the prime of life to have had taken from me, owing to certain psychic changes in the human race occasioned, I am sad to say, by the very profession that brought me

fame and fortune, my sole means of livelihood. Difficult is it, indeed, for a man who has worked hard in his chosen field to find himself suddenly unsought after save for an occasional atavism, and what else is there left for him to do, no longer recognized by mankind for the Great Man he truly is, but to leave the walks of men behind and retire to his Retreat and write his Memoirs and build a fitting memorial to himself? Thus one day this once-great and famous man is sitting in his tower room, hard at work upon one of the many gems which he is creating for posterity, and sees approaching from afar two visitors, and as one of them happens to be a female of the species who is built like a brick Betelgeuse Six fitzenframerhouse he decides to accord her a welcome fit for one of those beautiful virgins of Yore who the Myceneans paid as tribute to the Minoan king."

Bill Harding felt a little dizzy. "Sir," he said, "since I don't know how long it's been since an atavism last sought your services, I must ask you a somewhat impertinent question: Are you still capable of performing a psychectomy?"

Wardwalker drew himself up to his full height. He turned a nearby dial on the wall, brightening the light, then he raised his right hand and extended his fingers. "Do you see these fingers, young man? Do you, young lady? Do you see how delicate they are? How graceful? How sensitive? How symmetrical? How can you doubt for one moment that—"

"I didn't say I doubted," Bill Harding interrupted hastily. "I only asked. Anyway, sir, it takes more than a set of sensitive fingers to perform a psychectomy, doesn't it? Isn't there some kind of machine involved?"

"The machine is a mere incidental,"

Wardwalker said loftily. "But naturally I have one." He peered at Bill Harding closely. "Are *you* an atavism, by any chance?"

"I am," Bill Harding said, "and I've come all the way from Far Out to seek your services. The company psychiatrist told me you were the only psychectomist left who'd kept up his union dues, which makes you my only hope. My—my name is Bill Harding."

Wardwalker was gazing fondly at his fingers. "Why, that's wonderful—just wonderful! It's been ages since I've had a patient. Sometimes my fingers tingle in the night, as though yearning to perform their appointed task! To heal, to save, to make well again!" The Psychectomist faced Gloria Grandonwheels. "And you, young lady—are you an atavism too? Is it possible that Dame Fortune, who has treated me so shoddily in my twilight years, has allowed *two* atavisms to come to me at one and the same time?"

"My name is Gloria Grandonwheels," Gloria Grandonwheels said, "and if you'll stop emoting for a few minutes, you old goat, we'll get down to business. How much?"

It shocked Bill Harding to hear her address such a renowned man so disrespectfully, but Wardwalker didn't seem in the least offended. Probably he'd had dealings with rich bitches before. "\$10,542.98," he said equably. "10,542.98!" Bill Harding gasped. "Why, that's more than I make in a week!"

"No doubt, young man, no doubt. But I didn't say it was going to cost *you* that much. I charge my patients in accordance to what I think they can afford to pay, and it's as plain to me, Bill Harding, that you're as poor as a churchmouse as it is that Miss Grand-

onwheels is as rich as a Hurshtenburg. And in her case it wouldn't need to be plain, it so happening I haven't been absent from the walks of men so long that I've forgotten the Grandonwheels-name. Was it Scootch iv whiskey your grandfather cornered the market on, Miss Grandonwheels, or maraschino-flavored birth-control pills? I can't quite remember which."

"Maraschino-flavored b.c. pills," Gloria Grandonwheels said proudly. "Maraschinnies."

"Oh yes. Certainly a solid enough rock to found a family fortune on." Wardwalker turned to Bill Harding. "You strike me as being a starving chemist or biologist, or something on that order. So for you, my fee will be a flat \$1000." Wardwalker picked up his Minotaur suit and slung it over his shoulder. "We will now adjourn to my palace proper, where I will show you some of my rare objets de art and, per-adventure, recite to you some of my poetry."

"You write *poetry*?" Gloria Grandonwheels demanded incredulously. "You're a *poet*?"

Wardwalker executed a modest little bow. "Only a minor one so far, Miss Grandonwheels, but I have hopes of someday ascending to a higher plateau."

Gloria Grandonwheels groaned. "First an Oedipal regressive psychodormital subliminal paranorm and now a senile Shakespeare!" she said. "Why does everything have to happen to me?"

IV

Having passed the meridian of my life, it may seem strange to my contemporaries that I should, at such an advanced age, bend my efforts toward writing poetry, and why I did not so

bend my efforts much sooner. Well, first of all, I never went to Skollege, although this might come as quite a surprise to those of my erstwhile friends and acquaintances who have heard me converse in Ancient French. Secondly, that I had a chance of becoming a Great Poet did not immediately occur to me, and thus I set my sights on becoming a Great Psychectomist instead. But now, having been laid off, so to speak, their (sic) being no more souls for me to psychect, I have decided to impart to the world in metric form some of the wisdom which I have accumulated through study and experience, and to let Mankind know, in lyrical language, how I feel about certain aspects of human nature.

Foreword to *The Collected Poems of Wardwalker the Psychectomist*:
Courtesy of the Wardwalker Memorial Library

ALONG THE TURNING twisting corridors of the labyrinth, in Wardwalker the Psychectomist's wake, walked Bill Harding and Gloria Grandonwheels. What new trick would Fate play upon them? What new danger would leap out upon them from the grim and mysterious shadows and endeavor to make a mockery out of their attempt to find happiness in the only way left open to them in a cold, cruel galactic civilization?

Presently, after waiting for Wardwalker to cache his Minotaur suit in a secret closet, they emerged from the labyrinth into a crowded room almost as large as the Pennsylvania Planet Spaceship Station. At first Bill Harding thought it *was* the Pennsylvania Planet Spaceship Station and that the people in it were waiting for spaceships; then he saw that it was a museum of some kind and realized

that the people weren't waiting but looking at objects in display cases standing along the walls and at a sarcophagus lying just below floor level in the center of the room and surrounded by a wrought-iron fence.

Some of the people were familiar to him. He recognized George Washington, Florence Nightingale, Marcus Aurelius, David Brinkley, Theodore Roosevelt, Honoré de Balzac (*two* Honoré de Balzacs), Joe Namath, Napoleon Bonapart Hill, Alfragar Boom, Benvenuto Cellini, Chet Huntley, Senator Thropwaite Smith-Jones III, Mary Pickford, Phillip the Arab, Clifford Irving, Nefertiti, Sigmund Freud, William Shakespeare, Muhammed Ali, Jimjemmersen and Lawrence Welk. Probably he would have recognized others, but the material with which Wardwalker had mentally supplied the various Weighstationlings in establishing permanent relationships with them was based on busts, postage stamps, daguerreotypes, photographs, portraits and artists' conceptions, and to make matters worse, his memory was spotty. To confound the picture further, the psychectomist either didn't like period-piece clothing or had forgotten that fashions change. In any event, all of the prominent personages present—men and women alike—were wearing the same garb he was: lavender semi-coveralls and calf-high electronic-engineer boots.

"You are unaware of it," said the Psychectomist, who had preceded Bill Harding and Gloria Grandonwheels into the room, "but you are standing in the newly opened Wardwalker Memorial Library. Permit me to show you some of his mementoes and collections which, as the centuries pass, will attain ever wider galactic renown as pilgrim after pilgrim visits this hal-

lowed shrine where once he walked and talked and breathed, and assure him of a permanent place among the Great Men of All Time."

Gloria Grandonwheels said, "I came here to have a psychectomy, not to be shown around some crummy old library by a rich egomaniac with a Great Man complex. Anyway, you're not dead yet—you're only '99 and 99/100 percent dead."

Bill Harding said, "That wasn't a very nice thing to say, Gloria, considering what this man is going to do for you."

Gloria Grandonwheels said, "Considering what he already did to me and considering what he's going to charge me for doing something else, I consider it to be a nicer thing to say than he deserves."

Wardwalker said, "Over there, Bill Harding, is my collection of pipes. Numbered among them is a rare meerschaum from Ottisbaga Thirteen and a genuine Tucca Frutta briar from Hulp Twenty-two. Come with me."

Bill Harding set his travelbag down, and the two men made their way through the crowd of visitors to the case containing the pipes, leaving Gloria Grandonwheels standing by the wall near a coterie of conversationalists that included Benjamin Franklin, Fyodor Dostoevski, Ann Boleyn, Leonardo da Vinci and Walter Cronkite.

After showing Bill Harding the pipe collection, Wardwalker escorted him on a grand tour of the rest of the enormous room. There were collections of just about everything under the suns: coins, stamps, Groose III potato bugs, Bog IX butterflies, Sol III smog-moths, primitive ballpoint pens and petrified terrestrial pussy willows.

Judging from the crowd of visitors milling around it, the pussy-willow

collection was the most popular of all the displays. "Superb!" one of the admirers exclaimed. "Splendid!" effervesced another. "Bone doo!" ejaculated a third, whom Bill Harding recognized as one of the two Honoré de Balzacs. "Nevaire avez I voired semblable wondaires. Magnificue, magnificue, magnificue!"

Upon the completion of the ground-floor tour, Wardwalker led the way up a narrow staircase to a gallery that encircled the room some twenty feet below the ceiling. It was devoted exclusively to portraits he had sat for at various times during his life. There were literally thousands of them, and every single one depicted him with a beard. Even at the age of sixteen, which was when the earliest of them had been painted, he looked a little bit like a goat.

"And now," he said dramatically, halting before a doorway beyond which a slender stairway spiraled upward and out of sight. "for the piece of resistance!"

THE PSYCHECTOMIST in the lead, the two men mounted the stairs to a little round room with concave windows that overlooked the entire valley. In the center of the room stood a desk and chair, and on the desk sat an inkwell with a quill pen stuck in it. Nearby lay a stack of writing paper, and next to it reposed an aluminum-leaf edition of *The Anatomy of Poësy*, by Muhammed Ali.

Spidery handwriting covered the topmost sheet of paper. Wardwalker picked it up. He cleared his throat: "Canto Sixteen:

"That money is the main cause
Of most crimes that are committed,
Of which we hear every day

Sans' doubt will be admitted."

Bill Harding blinked.

"Of all there are in the cosmos
Of men, no matter their color,
The ones abhorred universally
Are the ones who most love the
—Dollar."

"Don't you think," said Bill Harding a little nervously, "that it's time we rejoined Miss Grandonwheels?"

Wardwalker didn't seem to hear him.

"Moneylovers have no shame,
They're such a miserable bunch,
That I consider them beneath
A race called the Quirafunch . . .

Miss Grandonwheels, did you say? Who is she?"

"Why, she's the young lady who came with me—don't you remember?"

"Oh yes—*Gloria Grandonwheels*. I recall her well. Her grandfather was in b.c. pills, wasn't he? Yes, we must rejoin her at once."

Gloria Grandonwheels had moved to the middle of the big room where the sarcophagus was and was leaning on the wrought-iron fence, gazing down at a brass plate inlaid in the stone lid. Several feet to her left stood Zane Grey. A similar distance to her right stood Dr. Spock.

Joining her and following her gaze, Bill Harding saw that there were words inscribed on the brass plate. He read them:

*Here lies Wardwalker the Great
That for all his money,
Thought often of the poor
For who the days aren't sunny.*

Gloria Grandonwheels had already read them. "The old hypocrite!" she said. "He doesn't even know what the word 'poor' means!"

"Shhh!" Bill Harding whispered. "He's right behind you."

Gloria Grandonwheels gasped when she saw how close behind her the Psychectomist really was. "Don't you dare, you old goat you!" she said.

"Dare what?" Wardwalker asked.

"You know. Anyway, why are we standing around like a bunch of dumb Weighstationlings? Why aren't you busy preparing for my psychectomy? I can't wait around all week—I've got a chartered ship coming tomorrow to pick me up."

"In due course, Miss Grandonwheels. In due course. Psychectomies aren't performed just any old time of day—they're done in the A.M. only, and you can't expect a psychectomist of my reputation to go against the fine grain of tradition, can you? I'll have Florence prepare the psychectomy room and I'll put you down as an out-patient for tomorrow morning. You, too, Bill Harding—might as well make it a simulectomy while we're at it. Meantime, I will escort both of you to balconied apartments overlooking my Pelepopolynesian Garden where you can dress for dinner, which will be served at Eight."

Gloria Grandonwheels glared at him. Then she picked up her travelbag and accompanied him across the room to an archway on the farther side. Bill Harding got his travelbag and followed.

v

AFTER PARTAKING of a nine-course dinner replete with exotic viands and rare wines and served by such diverse and colorful Weighstationages as Dio-

cletian, Bodenbunk Bard and Dear Abby, Gloria Grandonwheels retired to her chambers and Bill Harding retired to his.

It was his intention to get a good night's sleep so that he could confront the forthcoming ordeal with a clear mind.

But he found he couldn't sleep.

Strangely restless, he stepped out on the balcony in his BVD's and looked down into the starlit Pelepopolynesian Garden. He saw toy-like ruttenbugga trees with pebbled paths winding among them, and greenswards gleaming like pale ponds. He smelled the poignant fragrance of posh blossoms and eeny-weeny blooms. He heard the aphrodisiacal tinkling of a rain-tree ritual fountain. Suddenly overcome by the beauty of the scene, he shinnied down a nearby Adisa-adiba chink vine and alighted lightly on the ground.

The Pelepopolynesian Garden was located somewhere within the labyrinth—exactly where, probably even Wardwalker himself didn't know. It was completely surrounded by balconied apartments, one of which—presumably at least—was the Psychectomist's, one of the one Bill Harding had just left via the chink vine, and one Gloria Grandonwheels'. The last was right across the way from Bill Harding's—just above the tinkling rain-tree ritual fountain—and it was toward it that he presently directed his footsteps.

Why did Bill Harding direct his footsteps toward—of all places—the balconied boudoir of this rich girl who held him in no higher esteem than she did a milch bug and whom she would have no more qualms about squashing? Certainly not because he had fallen in love with her, and certainly not because he had fallen in

love with the Grandonwheels' fortune either. He was neither unstable when it came to Love, nor greedy when it came to Money. No, the real reason Bill Harding directed his footsteps toward Gloria Grandonwheels balconied boudoir was that he'd had a sudden irrational urge to take a dip in the rain-tree ritual fountain that stood just beneath it.

When he reached the fountain he jumped in without a moment's hesitation. It was a large one, and unique in that its contents emanated from a series of small spouts located at regular intervals along its circular rim as well as from a large spout in its center. This spout functioned as the mouth of a statue of the Pelepopolynesian rain-tree god, and since the god was polyhermaphroditic the statue had twelve breasts and six sets each of male and female reproductive organs. It was so large that it obscured most of the opposite side of the fountain.

The water came to Bill Harding's knees. He lay down in it and let it soak into his pores; then he got to his feet and waded over to the statue, intending to take a good-luck draught from the stream of water issuing from its mouth.

That was when he saw Gloria Grandonwheels.

That was when Gloria Grandonwheels saw him.

She, too, was in the fountain, wearing nothing but a pink chemise, and she, too, had approached the statue for the purpose of imbibing a good-luck draught.

She stared at Bill Harding.

Bill Harding stared at her.

A thin veneer of civilization is a strange thing. While it is not by any means limited to the clothing a person wears nor to his or her surround-

ings, the fact cannot be gainsaid that a person neither looks nor feels the same standing in a rain-tree ritual fountain in his/her BVD's/chemise as he/she does standing on a metropolitan street corner wearing ordinary apparel.

Gone was the frost from Gloria Grandonwheels' eyes. Gone, the hauteur from her mien. Here was the gentle love-starved maiden so long concealed by the cruel crinolines of civilization. Here was the *real* Gloria Grandonwheels.

"Bill Harding," she whispered.

"Gloria Grandonwheels," Bill Harding whispered back.

They reached hungrily for each other. In their eagerness, they slipped and fell. Laughing like two playful children, they regained their feet after a great deal of splashing about, and waded out of the fountain. Entering the rutenbugga grove, they found a greensward . . .

Great was the tempest that took place in Wardwalker's Pelepopolynesian Garden on that memorial night. The stars stared down in shocked incredulity. Rutenbugga trees tingled to their very roots. Night flowers trembled in their earthy beds. Posh blossoms and eeny-weeny blooms looked on askance. Weighstation faltered momentarily on its journey around its sun.

But it was not love these two lovers knew—it was pure primeval passion, passion that left them lying limp upon the greensward, spent and enervated. Dreamily they gazed into each other's eyes. "Bill Harding," Gloria Grandonwheels murmured. "Gloria Grandonwheels," Bill Harding murmured back.

"Oh son, son, son," wailed a familiar voice, "how could you have done this terrible thing to me!" and raising

his eyes, Bill Harding was astonished to see his mother standing a short distance away pointing an accusing finger at him. "After all I did for you. After all I told you about Life. She's not for such as you, Bill Harding! Are you so blind you cannot see so simple a truth as that? She's rich. She's arrogant. She's conceited. She's cruel. Once you've satisfied her passing passion she'll drop you like a used Kleenex and never think of you again. Oh son, son, son!"

Gloria Grandonwheels had sat up. Now she fixed Bill Harding with a baleful gaze. "So *that's* what you think of me, you Oedipal regressive psycho-dormital subliminal paranormal peasant you! After I gave you my all! After I sacrificed my maidenly purity just so your base desires could be slaked! After—"

Her voice trailed away. A second stray Weighstationling had entered the clearing and had turned into the same tall spare woman with the wart on the end of her nose that the footbridge Weighstationling had turned into that afternoon.

Gloria Grandonwheels began searching wildly for her chemise. In vain: it was nowhere to be found. "No, no, Mother Mackey!" she cried. "It's not what you think. It's—"

By this time Mother Mackey was pointing an accusing finger of her own. "Oh Gloria, Gloria, Gloria! You always were a headstrong girl! If I told your father once, I told him a hundred times. 'Mr. Grandonwheels,' I said, 'that daughter of yours will come to no good. She's too independent, and there's a fatal trace of nymphomania in her nature.' 'Well do the best you can, Mother Mackey,' he said. 'Do the best you can.' And I did. I taught you how important your virginity was and explained to you

how your being an atavism and having a soul would only make it harder for you to keep it, because souls only make it hard for people to do to others as they *wouldn't* want others to do to them. And I explained to you time and time again that a maiden's virginity is a negotiable asset, and that for her to throw it away in a burst of primeval passion is tantamount to throwing away Money. And what happens? You fall victim to the first man you've ever been alone with for more than five minutes, and you the heiress of the Grandonwheels' fortune and him nothing but an Oedipal regressive psycho-dormital subliminal paranormal peasant! And now your maidenhead is no more!—oh Gloria, Gloria, Gloria!"

Bill Harding found a rock and threw it at the two stray Weighstationlings, and they turned back into transprotoplasmic bedsheets and fluttered out of the clearing. But when he looked for Gloria Grandonwheels, she was gone.

VI

Concise, dazzling in their unaffected brilliance, these little gems of purest ray serene are certain to find a place in the annals of poesy uniquely their own.

—McGeorge Cashdollar, *The New York XXIII Times*

One more dreary example of how a person renowned in one field can obtain instant recognition in another merely by waving a little plastic flag and shouting, "I am here!" Proof positive that one ounce of association is worth ten pounds of talent.

—Patrick José Tyentyentyenkiof,
The Rucksack I Courier
Hooray! Hooray! Hooray! At long last a new light through yonder liter-

ary window breaks! It is the east, and Wardwalker is the sun!

—Barbrabriggs, *The Box IX Review*

The conscientious reviewer, when confronted with an horrendous package such as The Collected Poems of Wardwalker the Psychectomist (Hill & Burgundy, 1066 pages, \$98.50) can only throw up his hands in despair and holler "Help!" Every single one of these asymmetrical little atrocities has as its theme, Money, and their message is as undeviating as a Rubba Dub-Dub rain dance: People who love Money and have a lot of it are Evil; People who don't love it and haven't very much of it are Noble. It is impossible to understand how Wardwalker, who made so much of it in his day, could have arrived at such an attitude unless one postulates that of recent years he has come upon a truth that conflicts jarringly with the Juridical Ethic upon which he founded his career and built his fortune (i.e., that the only Hereafter a human being can know lies in the minds of humans that follow him, and that therefore the soul is superfluous and constitutes a hindrance in a competitive society); that he turned Money into a sort of whipping boy in order to atone for his having accumulated so much of it.

—Johansen Streethawker, *The Scootch IV Sentinel*

From *The Scrapbook of Wardwalker the Psychectomist*; courtesy of the Wardwalker Memorial Library

BILL HARDING did not see Gloria Grandonwheels again until she was escorted into the psychectomy room the next morning by Florence Nightingale. He himself had already been escorted there by the same Weighstationage. The rich girl didn't

even look in his direction as she entered, but the fiery flames that shot upward from her graceful neck into her soft cheeks bore unmistakable evidence of the fact that she was only too well aware of his presence.

The psychectomy room had a rather cramped aspect, largely owing to the huge psychectomation machine that occupied three quarters of the available space. More than anything, the machine resembled a big chrome-plated filing cabinet with four drawers. Two of the "drawers" had been pulled out and stood revealed as electronic operating tables prefitted with Schlotz-Febley webwires and psychic suction tubes. At the time of Gloria Grandonwheels' entry, Bill Harding was lying on one of them clad in a pink one-piece hospital gown.

Florence Nightingale pulled a little screen down from the ceiling, took her new patient behind it and got her out of her clothes and into a similar gown. As might have been expected, Gloria Grandonwheels turned out to be an eyeful in such attire, but you couldn't prove it by Bill Harding. He accorded her a single hate-filled glance as she paraded over to the other table and lay down, which was more than she accorded him.

Wardwalker entered wearing white duck-trousers, a white smock and a white skullcap, went over to the wash basin and scrubbed for five full minutes. He then held up his arms, and Florence Nightingale pulled white rubber gloves down over his hands and forearms. "I hope the operation will be a success, doctor," she said.

"My operations are always successful, Florence. And now, if you will hand me my eight-inch crescent wrench, we will begin."

Florence Nightingale removed the instrument from a steaming surgical

tray with a pair of chrome tongs and placed it in Wardwalker's extended right hand. Purposefully he walked between the two operating tables and halted in front of the "filing cabinet". For the first time in his life, Bill Harding knew naked fear, and as for Gloria Grandonwheels, her eyes were wide with it.

Bending forward, the psychectomist examined the face of the psychectomation machine. Presently he found what he was searching for—a small nut protruding a quarter of an inch from the otherwise featureless surface. Deftly he adjusted the precision-jaws of the crescent wrench to the proper width, applied them to the nut and gave it a half-turn counterclockwise. No sooner had he done so than the Schlotz-Febley webwires and the psychic suction tubes attached themselves hungrily to Bill Harding's and Gloria Grandonwheels' psychic nerve-ends.

Bill Harding felt a pronounced tingling. He heard Gloria Grandonwheels gasp. The psychectomation machine, he saw, had taken on a reddish glow.

Wardwalker waited five seconds, then gave the nut a quarter-turn clockwise. The reddish glow diminished. Then he gave the nut another quarter-turn clockwise, bringing it back to its original position. The reddish glow faded completely and the Schlotz-Febley webwires and the psychic suction tubes detached themselves from the two patients and retracted into the two operating tables.

The psychectomist faced Florence Nightingale. Expertly she removed the wrench from his hand and peeled off his rubber gloves. "Well done, doctor," she said. "Well done, indeed."

"Thank you, Florence."

Florence Nightingale withdrew,

and Wardwalker regarded his two patients. "Well how do you two feel?" he asked.

"The same as I did before," Bill Harding said, sitting up.

"So do I," Gloria Grandonwheels said, also sitting up.

Suddenly hers and Bill Harding's eyes met. Held. Bill Harding felt himself melting. An expression such as he had never seen before on a woman's face suffused Gloria Grandonwheels' countenance. He saw Yearning in her eyes. Love, Adoration, Compassion, Humility. Although he did not know it, these same emotions filled his eyes too. All he knew was that she was the most beautiful, the most desirable, the most noble woman he had ever seen. Why, he would gladly die for her. He would do *anything* for her!

"I would gladly die for you," he said. "I would do *anything* for you!"

"I would gladly die for you too," she said humbly.

Abruptly she gasped, as though she'd just remembered something, and the expression he had never seen before on a woman's face gave way to one of acute contrition. "Oh no!" she cried. "Oh no! How could I have demeaned myself so in his eyes! How could I have behaved like a common chickle-boat tramp with *Him*! How could I have? How could I have? How could I have!" And to Bill Harding's astonishment, she jumped off the table, gathered up her clothes and ran from the room.

Wildly he gathered up his own clothes and was about to take off after her when Wardwalker grabbed his arm. "No, Bill Harding—not yet. There's something you should know first."

"I know she loves me and that I love her, and that's all I need to

know!" Bill Harding cried. Abruptly *he* gasped. "Why, it was your removing our souls that did it, wasn't it? They must have been imposing some kind of psychic block that prevented us from seeing each other in our true light. Let go my arm—I've got to go after her!"

"Calm down," said Wardwalker. "And get into your clothes. You can go after her later on—she's not going very far. Meanwhile we'll take a slow walk to the Wardwalker Memorial Library and I'll acquaint you with the facts of life as I, Wardwalker the Psychectomist, lately turned Poet, have come to know them."

"Well . . . all right," Bill Harding agreed.

FOR A WHILE after leaving the psychectomy room Wardwalker was silent. Then, "In a way, a soul is a good thing to have," he said. "Morally, at least, it for the most part keeps a person on the right path, even though it keeps him from getting ahead in the World. But it has a big drawback even aside from its being a hindrance to successful thinking, because it tells a person what he ought and ought not to do *only for his own good*—not anybody else's. It doesn't make him love anybody else, and it doesn't make him love himself any less. If anything, it makes him love himself more. And if a person is inclined to think a lot of himself to begin with, he thinks even more of himself. No, a psychectomist can't feel bad about removing a malignant growth that does that to people, and I *don't* feel bad about it. What makes me feel bad is that the true use to which the science of psychectomy should have been put didn't occur to me till it was too late. If I'd thought of it in time I could have changed my

patients from hypocrites into true human beings by making it possible for them to love somebody besides themselves. It would have involved a simulectomy every time I plied my profession, but it could have been done. Well anyway," Wardwalker concluded sadly, "I made a lot of money."

"I don't follow you," Bill Harding said. "What true use could the science of psychectomy have besides removing souls?"

They had reached the Library and were working their way through the crowd of Weighstationages toward the archway on the farther side of the room through which Gloria Grandonwheels had undoubtedly gone to pick up the rest of her belongings in her balconied apartment. "When you and Gloria Grandonwheels showed up for psychectomies," Wardwalker continued, "I was even more pleased than I let on, because unwittingly you were providing me with an opportunity to make up for, a little bit at least, the big mistake which was all my life had amounted to. And a little bit means a lot when a person has passed the meridian of their life like I have. I did more than just remove yours and Gloria Grandonwheels' souls, Bill Harding—I interchanged them, thereby making it possible for both of you to love somebody besides yourselves . . . to love each other."

Bill Harding was stunned. "You *interchanged* them! Well of all the underhanded—"

He paused. A commotion had begun in the vicinity of the archway, and its author was none other than Gloria Grandonwheels herself. Re-attired in her travelclothing and carrying her travelbag, she had entered the room and was showing her way through the milling Weighstationages

"But what am I going to do? I'll never be able to find her in those crazy corridors, and sooner or later she'll reach the outside and meet the ship that's coming for her and—"

Collection;
courtesy of the Wardwalker Memorial
Library

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Editorial (cont. from page 4)

By the end of the fifties "flying saucers" were almost a fad of the past, the initial wave of excitement over. Most people had made up their minds, one way or the other, and were waiting for evidence to the contrary before taking up the topic once more.

But incidents kept occurring. One evening in the late sixties an old friend who lived on Long Island told me soberly about what *he'd* seen. He'd seen *something* inexplicable in the night skies and it had convinced him. He didn't talk about it much, and he didn't join any groups on its account, but it had changed his mind for him.

By then they weren't "flying saucers" any more. They were Unidentified Flying Objects—Air Force terminology: a way of labelling something you don't have a label for—they were UFOs.

A vast para-religion has grown up around UFOs, subdivided into many sects, those ranging from actual UFO worshippers to the cataloguers who kept voluminous notebooks full of every "known" observation or encounter.

Some of the entries in those books are frauds, however—and it would be illuminating to know what the percentage of those frauds is. A friend of mine, a science fiction writer, is in at least one published book of UFO encounters, and the way it happened is instructive.

Basically, he started it as a hoax while a college student. He phoned a local radio station with the news that he'd seen a UFO. That momentary act, the product of boredom and a desire for some harmless mischief, snowballed until "UFOlogists" were interviewing him with all the seriousness of the FBI tracking down a state secret. The most amazing part of the interview, my friend says, is the way the interviewers led the interview—the leading questions they asked. "All

I had to do was to tell them what they wanted to hear, and they kept asking me these question, like, 'Did they use old cars that looked like new?' I'd say 'Sure,' and they'd get all excited. 'It fits! It fits! This confirms it!' It was so *easy*."

When you're aware of a case like that, you can find it a lot harder to take other reports seriously.

MEANWHILE, BACK IN HOLLYWOOD: When the first reports were leaked out in middle-1977, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* was described as "an adult science fiction movie," and a movie that would "put *Star Wars* in the shade."

Later, when the movie was ready to open, reviewers were flown across country to attend special screenings in one of the biggest publicity moves in years. The studio executives were nervous; the fate of the company depended on the success of the movie and even rumors about its success (or lack thereof) could send the company's stock up or down to an alarming extent.

It's been a remarkable year when one "sci-fi" film—*Star Wars*—could outgross every other movie ever made, and one of its closest runners-up could be *Close Encounters*.

I don't regard *Close Encounters* as "sci-fi," you may be glad to hear. But neither do I think it's "science fiction," adult or otherwise. *Close Encounters* is simply the ultimate "flying saucer"—pardon me; make that UFO—movie. It is a synthesis of the popular myths and legends which have grown up in thirty short years around something about which we actually know no more than ever. It tells us a good deal more about the people who "believe" in UFOs than it does about the UFOs itself. The movie's success hinges on the fact that it has exposed millions more people to 'the UFO experience' than ever before had the opportunity to experi-

(cont. on page 120)



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COLD THE STARS ARE, COLD THE EARTH

RICHARD C. MEREDITH

Wrecked upon a hostile planet, she had to make the best of her meagre resources . . .

Illustrated by Richard Olsen

THE WINDS could not possibly have been as cold as they seemed as they whistled around the broken hull of the lifeboat, half-buried in ice and snow, partially dug into the loose stone of the rugged plateau, if such a small area could be called a plateau. When she checked the surviving instruments and saw that the meter that purported to be the outside thermometer registered -38°C, she decided that the wind was every bit as cold as it sounded.

Although the metal shield of the lifeboat's observation dome had been unable to slide back more than a third of its proper distance—blocked by a wrinkle in the hull—she still had a fairly wide view of what lay outside the boat and beyond it; and none of what she saw was very inviting. And it could be summed up in three words: ice; snow, stone.

Ice. Snow. Stone. Though it was quite warm inside the lifeboat's forward section and though the Lady Felice Stavanger was warmly enough dressed, she still shivered, though it was perhaps as much from apprehension as it was from cold—or rather the prospect of cold that lay only centimeters away through the hull's

metal and the dome's paragas.

Ice. Snow. Stone. The lifeboat had made a rather decent landing, all things considered. It lay canted at an angle of no more than 10° or 15°, its nose slightly buckled and buried in snow and shattered ice that looked like frosted glass, and the only major rupture in the hull seemed to be in the boat's rear, just under the drive units where jagged stones and ice as hard as stone had torn the thin metal open as the boat came in, bouncing, sliding to a ragged stop. The boat's landing skids had absorbed their share of the shock, and more, and that the Lady Felice had neither broken bones nor lacerated flesh she owed to those skids. But when the skids gave way the hull had taken the final beating that tore it open. Fortunately there were tight radiation seals and an airlock between the boat's forward cabin and the now open rear section, filling with bone chilling snow.

But, she thought, smiling to herself, the fact that she had landed at all was something of a miracle, and for that she gave thanks to the boat's tiny but very sophisticated computer. Without it she probably would never have been able to make entry into the

planet's atmosphere, would probably never have touched down at all, even this far south. No, she corrected herself, without that computer—now damaged beyond her abilities to repair it—she would probably still be adrift in interstellar space, waiting to die very slowly over time measured in months, of starvation or thirst or perhaps just simple loneliness.

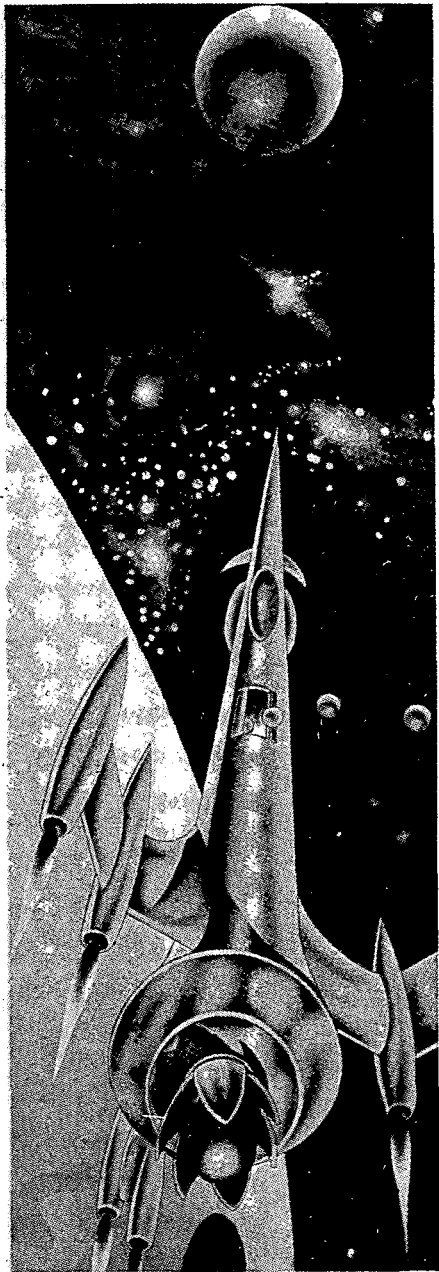
Piloting extra-atmospheric craft lost between the stars did not lie within the many talents of the Lady Felice Stavanger, formerly First Secretary to Rebekka the Green who had been Protectoress of the Commonwealth of Cybele.

But now she was no longer in the Cybelene court. Now she was alone on the surface of one of the least habitable of all the inhabited worlds in this part of the galaxy, without personal belongings beyond the clothes she wore and the contents of her mind, and without resources save these and the contents of the lifeboat, and those were yet to be inspected.

It would be quite wrong to say that the Lady Felipe felt despair. If she felt anything at all it was nothing beyond a mild sense of shock—shock that the *Dalmatia* had exploded so violently in space, shock that she had been the only one to reach the safety of *this* particular lifeboat, shock that the lifeboat had crashed on the planet known as Breakdown Heights after being more than three standard months in space, shock at the landscape before her and at her limited prospects of rescue. And yet, even at that, it was only a mild sense of shock.

Now she sat in the boat's command seat, looking out through the partially open dome, and silently regarded the ice, the snow, the stone.

This place, too far south for her



comfort but where the lifeboat's computer and her own rather inept handling had brought her down, was relatively level, the rest of the landscape considered. Before her, a dozen meters or so away, a sharp, stony crag reared into the sky, slashing upward through the ice and snow, pointing like a haggard finger into the thin, fragile dome of blue-gray sky. A pitiful gray-green plant, grotesquely twisted by the wind, clung tenaciously to the base of the stone finger with a multitude of long, slender, ivy-like roots. The wind, which she could hear through the hull, screaming, moaning, crying like a thousand unlamented ghosts of those who had died so long ago on this world, whipped snow and needles of glittering ice along the surface of the ground, around the truncated cigar of the boat, along the ragged base of the rearing crag, and beyond. Her eyes followed the water-like flowing of the ice storm, a wind-whipped fog of ice slivers that rose no more than a meter above the surface as it splashed against the pointing finger of stone, piling the drifts there deeper, and then beyond to where the ice-stone land fell away, gradually at first, spotted here and there with the gray-green plants which somehow endured the weather. Then it sloped more sharply, until at a distance of perhaps half a kilometer away it plunged off into a deep gorge whose bottom she could not see from inside the boat, and truly had little desire to see.

Beyond the gorge, at a distance she would guess to be better than a kilometer, another cliff rose, gray stone, gray-white ice, climbing upward in tiers, receding as they climbed, to become first one, then a series of mountain peaks some kilometers away, gray and purple in

the distance, with great white glaciers flowing down their sides, perhaps into the gorge before her, or perhaps into other gorges, chasms, fissures in the hard, gray stone of Breakdown Heights. It was a view of immense and uninterrupted coldness and harshness. In all the known galaxy she knew of few places where she would have preferred less to be stranded. But her preferences were not a matter of great importance at the present.

After a while the Lady Felice came out of her half-trance, reached for her purse and pulled out the long dark cylinder of an Odinese cigar. She touched it to her lips, drew air through it and then smoke as its tip ignited. She inhaled the slightly euphoric smoke deeply, pleasurably, and then sat back in the seat, coming as near to relaxing as she could at the present moment. She would wait for a while longer; but just for a little while.

... probably rebekka, norbale and the others got to a lifeboat . . . they would have been as near to a boat as i was probably. . . there was warning time enough. . . well, if there was for me there probably was for them too. . . i hope rebekka made it. . . it would have been so ignominious a way for her to die. . . a spaceship sabotaged by-by whom? . . . well, that's something i'll probably never know. . . a federation spy? . . . a traitor? . . . some spineless bastard like yaldelar waiting for his chance to get back at rebekka for all those years of insults, and not having courage to do it until rebekka was a hunted beast, fleeing for her life . . . god, what petty beings we are at times. . . oh, how cold the stars are, cold the earth. . .

The incredibly expensive cigar was half gone when her eyes slid back to

the lifeboat's command console, to the multi-channel transmitter that had automatically been beaming a *mayday* signal since the boat hit the fringes of the planet's atmosphere, for the hour and a half that the lifeboat had been resting on the planet's surface. The dim pilot light indicated that the receiver was on and the self-checking circuitry verified that it was working properly, that both the transmitter and receiver were operating, that a signal calling for help was screaming from the ship. And yet there had been no answer to her distress call.

The Lady Felice was not very surprised at this. This *was* Breakdown Heights and hospitality for uninvited strangers was not among this planet's noted virtues. Particularly human ones. The inhabitants of Breakdown Heights had a very consistent record of dislike for their fellow men.

Another half-hour, she promised herself. If there were no reply by then, she would go on the air herself and see if a living human voice would gain some response.

While she waited for the time to pass she checked the lifeboat's survival handbook. Its entry for Breakdown Heights was distressingly short and depressing in tone. There was little doubt that she would not be welcome here, even if she were a fugitive from the Federation's "justice".

Still, despair was a very remote thing from the mind of the Lady Felice Stavanger. She had not felt such a thing in a *very* long time. And she was not going to take up the habit at her age.

A HALF-HOUR later she glanced at the survival manual once more and then at the transmitter operator's text, then switched the transmitter to one of the planet's more frequently used

channels. Cutting in both microphone and 3-v scanner, she began to speak.

"Mayday, mayday," she said. "This is a lifeboat of the Cybelene Cruiser *Dalmatia* calling for help. I have crashed on your planet and am in need of assistance. Mayday, mayday, this is a lifeboat of the Cybelene Cruiser *Dalmatia* . . ."

She continued to broadcast until her throat became dry and she was forced to get a drink of water. Then, after igniting another cigar, she resumed her call for help. "Mayday, mayday, this is a lifeboat of. . ."

The receiver crackled to life, its loudspeaker uttering a rasping, mechanical sound. Then a human voice spoke, though no image appeared in the 3-v tank.

"Yeah, yeah, I hear ya," the harsh, annoyed, masculine voice said. "What th' hell ya want, huh?"

"I don't have visual on you," the Lady Felice said, though she whispered thankfulness to herself.

"Visual be damn, babe," the male voice said. "What th' hell ya want?"

"I want help," the Lady Felice said simply.

The voice laughed harshly. "Don't we all, babe?"

She allowed a carefully pitched tone of pleading to enter her voice. "My lifeboat has crashed. I'm all alone and I don't know where I am. I need someone to get a location on me and a pickup."

"An' ya figure I'm gonna do it, huh?"

This came as no surprise. She had expected it. "I'm a human being in need of help." She didn't say "woman". That much should have been quite obvious from her voice.

The voice laughed the same harsh laugh. "Babe, ya know where ya are?"

"No. I mean, I know that I'm

somewhere in the southern hemisphere of Breakdown Heights, on the daylight side, somewhere between 40° and 50° south."

"Then ya know just 'bout as much as I do, babe. I can't help ya."

"Can't help, or won't?"

"Babe, this is Breakdown Heights, ya know. Ya wasn't invited. Whatta ya expect, a band an' a red carpet an' a suite in th' Hades-Hilton, maybe?"

"I expect very little," she answered frankly, though still letting her voice plead.

"An' that's what yer gonna get." The voice paused. "I ain't got no time to help no friggin' outworlder woman."

She was silent for a moment, considering the possibilities, then said, "But I could die out here without help."

"That's yer lookout, babe. Now, look, get offa my frequency, will ya? I got work to do."

"But..."

The receiver crackled once more and then grew silent. The carrier was gone. The man had stopped transmitting.

The Lady Felice Stavanger sat back in the command seat, picked up the forgotten cigar and then looked out through the partially open dome at the ice and snow and stone, at the cold wind, at the cold earth. She tried to bring into her mind the Quivera techniques of relaxation taught her long ago by the Sisters of Lhasa, but somehow they didn't seem to help now.

Ice. Snow. Stone.

She had come a long way from the sunny fields of Surya, but she still had a long way to go. She had never learned the meaning of resignation.

BREAKDOWN HEIGHTS: that was a

hell of a fine name for this planet. It was a world a little larger than Earth, enough larger at least that you could feel the greater pull of gravity. It was colder than Earth or Surya or Cybele; the scene of savage vulcanism over an unstable core, a planet of soaring heights and plunging chasms, of frequent quakes and great slidings of land, a planet with a few level plateaus and a few fertile valleys, a large number of lakes, some of water, more of perpetual ice, a planet of volcanos and snow, of uncharted wind patterns and uncharted terrain.

Breakdown Heights: colonized by accident something over a standard century before. A humanity-packed colonial starship out of over-crowded old Earth had been on its way to the fertile, virgin world called Pasupati when it ran into trouble. Magnetic cocoons had broken down, superheated plasma had run amuck through the drive sections, circuitry had been burned away and the ship had come plunging out of stardrive near UR-589-42, a K1 star hardly worthy of having a listing in the Breston Catalog, a star with three planets: one a gas giant worth a Jupiter and a half; one a Mercury-like cinder; and one—well, it came to be called Breakdown Heights.

The distressed starship, most of its drive units burned away, came down on the only planet in the system that seemed to offer even a marginal possibility, had landed as only a crippled starship can land, splashing its wreckage over dozens of square kilometers, killing better than half its colonial passengers and all of its crew.

The survivors, dazed, broken, bleeding, had huddled together in what shelter they could make or find, had patched together half a dozen FTL message probes and desperately

plunged them into space, desperately calling for help.

No help came.

They died by the hundreds: exposure, frostbite, starvation, disease.

Still no one came.

Not for half a century.

By the time the long overdue Federation rescue ship arrived the descendants of the survivors didn't want help, not from those damned outworlders who had let so many of them die.

"Get th' hell away from here," they told their would-be rescuers. "Ya didn't come when we needed ya, so don't come now, hear? We made out this long. We don't need ya bastards."

The survivors, now the natives of Breakdown Heights, had come to hate the human race, any members of it other than themselves. Aliens were more welcome on Breakdown Heights than were other humans, particularly aliens who paid in hard cold cash and valuable machinery for the hard cold men of Breakdown Heights to fight in the hard cold wars between the stars.

By the time the Lady Felice Stavanger crashed on Breakdown Heights it had become a world of prospectors, miners, and, most of all, mercenary soldiers, some of the finest, deadliest fighting machines in the known galaxy.

They needed help from no one, and gave it to none.

i doubt that rebekka's lifeboat would have headed this way, not if norbale survived. . . they would have gone back toward krishna, probably. . . further away, but a more likely place to go. . . on krishna she would receive help. . . she had some supporters there who would find her a ship. . . would get her away from the feds. . . if her luck held. . . if her luck came

back. . . rebekka's luck had been running low of late. . . to hell with rebekka. . . like the man said, it's my lookout now. . .

The resources at the disposal of the Lady Felice were, relatively speaking, slender. Not that an interstellar cruiser's lifeboat could be said to be poorly stocked, for there was ample equipment for survival—over long periods of time in deep space. However, there was very little equipment here for making long journeys over land, on a relatively high gravity planet of ice and snow and incredibly rugged mountains. The Lady Felice could possibly survive a year inside the boat; outside it, even wearing one of the oversized spacesuits, she could probably not have made fifty kilometers across the terrible terrain of Breakdown Heights—if there had been anything within fifty kilometers worth going to.

Still, despite the unnamed man's gruff refusal to aid her, despite the limited resources available, the Lady Felice Stavanger did not yet begin to feel despair. The woman who had become the second most powerful person on Cybele during the Protectorate of Rebekka the Green was not one given easily to despair. There were still two other resources.

Her sex.

Her mind.

Neither of which were to be counted lightly, even on Breakdown Heights.

THE WOMAN who had been born Ulgana Kharr on Surya seventy-two standard years before and who had been, at one time or another, just about everything a woman could be from a Lunaport whore to First Secretary of the Cybelene Commonwealth, had hardly made her long journey by

luck alone.

The Lady Felice Stavanger, *ne* Uligana Kharr, knew exactly how much of her rise to power on Cybele to attribute to sexual attractiveness (and Esterhazy Treatments) and to certain, if not unique at least rare, mental abilities which were: (1) a rather low order of telepathy, (2) almost total recall and (3) the natural abilities of a consummate actress.

Had Rebekka Greenshire been more careful in her dealings with the Terran Federation, had Rebekka been more courteous in her relationship with the Sisters of Lhasa, had Rebekka been more cautious in her violations of Cybele's Federation-endorsed constitution, had Rebekka been less sure of her abilities to outwit, out-manuever and even outfight the Federation, the Lady Felice Stavanger would probably have one day, in her own good time, become the Protectress of Cybele herself. But Rebekka, for all her strengths, had her weaknesses. She had stepped too far: had challenged the Federation to open combat. The Cybelene War had been fought and lost. Rebekka and her court had been outlawed, had fled Cybele aboard the *Dalmatia*, had met disaster between the stars—and thus the Lady Felice found herself in her present position.

That the *Dalmatia* had been sabotaged was not for a moment doubted by the Lady Felice. Whether Rebekka or any of the others beside Felice had escaped the doomed starship was a matter of conjecture, and one that would henceforth concern little of the Lady Felice's attention. She was an outlaw now, the same as Rebekka. Now her concern was in two orders: (1) immediate survival and (2) her future beyond that survival. Quite simply her loyalty to Rebekka had

ended with the explosion that destroyed the *Dalmatia*. Her loyalty was now to her own life and her life alone. Period.

SHE GAZED OUT through the port, into the gray sky, at the dim and distant red-orange sun of Breakdown Heights. She watched the strange play of ice crystals blowing across the sun's face, feeling as if she were in a world even stranger than she knew this one to be. Suddenly, as if from a hammer blow, the sky seemed to shatter, to fall apart like broken glass, dissolving into tiny fragments falling across the red-orange sun. A golden shower fell toward the ice and stones, and as if in answer to it, a shaft of silver light climbed up into their midst, a slender column like a spear, striking at and through the heart of the star-sun. Moments later a second lance of light flashed across the sky, at right angles to the first, crossing in the sun's center, making a perfect cross. In no more time than it took for her to draw in her breath two tiny, imitation suns, one blue, the other orange, appeared on the ends of the horizontal arms of the cross. Then it all dissolved as quickly as it had come and the sky was gray-blue, the sun orange, and the ice fall was gone.

For an instant she imagined that this was some signal to her that rescuers were coming, and then she remembered, drawing up from her deep memory stories she had heard, things she had read about the strange effects of cold and ice and light, the tricks of beauty and mirage they can create, and she sat back and smiled, and realized that for all its harshness, Breakdown Heights was not without some beauty.

The wind still whistled and moaned around the hull of the boat. The

sound could have been very depressing.

AMONG THE ARTICLES aboard the lifeboat was a mirror. The Lady Felice took out that mirror, placed it on the console before her and took a good long time gazing at her own image in it. Not in narcissistic admiration, but in simple, objective appraisal.

That the Lady Felice was seventy-two standard years old was hardly obvious. Esterhazy Treatments had seen to that and would see to it for a number of years to come. It would be another five or six decades before she began to look even half her present chronological age.

What would we women have done without Dr. Esterhazy?

Now, as she sat inside the lifeboat, wind howling around it, piling ice/snow drifts even higher, she looked at the reflected image of a girl in the midst of the first blush of youth, perhaps eighteen or twenty standard, unless you looked carefully into her gray eyes. Then you might wonder. There was a depth and a strangeness to those eyes that showed something of the age of the mind that dwelt a few centimeters behind those eyes, a mind whose natural abilities had been sharpened by those years.

But, without close study, you saw a fresh young face, a warm, smiling, more-than-average pretty face, with a nose that betrayed her Earth Italian ancestry, with a generous mouth and full, perhaps overripe lips, a face with a mobility that took good advantage of its attractive features. Beauty is often more than just line and curve and color. At the present time her long, rich hair was black, to match the dark skin she had recently acquired, and she found it very becoming—the hair

and the skin coloring.

She was now dressed in a simple white blouse with no adornment other than a Dramic monogram that represented the Roman Characters' "FS" (Felice Stavanger) and a short yellow, pocketless skirt—hardly the opulent robes of state of the First Secretary of Cybele, but these she had been forced to leave behind, these and a fortune in precious gems and Kendallian exchange disks. The body under the clothing was perhaps not as richly endowed as were the bodies of some women—Rebekka herself had been fuller of bust and hips (*But how much of that did she owe to the body shops?* the Lady Felice wondered)—but it was none the less a well-rounded and attractive body, and had given her good service in several ways. Men had found great pleasure in it, even as she had used it as a weapon against some of them while they had thought it a toy to be played with. *Oh, how Darvine of of Landown had learned who was the cat and who the mouse!*

The Lady Felice smiled at her image in the mirror. She did not overrate its utility under the present circumstances. She merely appraised it and listed it among her assets—that is, if the men of Breakdown Heights did not have some bizarre concepts of feminine beauty—Ubangi lips? Grotesque tattoos? Grossness of fat? She didn't know.

Her ability to "read" minds depended almost exclusively upon direct physical contact with her subject; and since she was in a lifeboat hundreds or thousands of kilometers from the nearest human being, it was of no great immediate value.

Nor was her capacious memory. In her seventy-two years she had never before had occasion to need to know

much about the planet called Breakdown Heights, and therefore there was nothing for her to delve from that memory to aid her here and now.

Her ability to assume roles: it had helped her out of tight spots before, and had been one of her greatest assets in her rise to power. But, well, she had to have an audience for that. And thus far she had had little success in obtaining one.

The Lady Felice put away her mirror and sat looking out at the ice and stones and pitiful plant-things and the play of the capricious wind and let her mind wander across time and space for a while, back into her memory and then out again. Surya. Captain Chain. Lunaport. The Sisterhood. The endless string of men. Charles Laseren. Earth and the Federation. The coup. Its failure. The Purge. Her flight. Cybele. And so much more.

She had two courses open to her, she told herself. She could sit in the lifeboat until she finally ran out of supplies and starved. Or she could get someone to come after her. She did not consider as a third choice attempting to make her way from the lifeboat alone. That was simply no choice at all.

So, sighing, she went back to the transmitter.

"Mayday, mayday. This is a lifeboat of the Cybelene Cruiser *Dalmatia* calling for help. Mayday, mayday. . ."

THE WORLD called Breakdown Heights rotated on its axis in something just over thirty-eight standard hours.

The Lady Felice was seeing her first dawn, a diminutive red-orange sun climbing slowly above the ragged peaks, when the receiver's loudspeaker came to life again, crackling, sputtering, then speaking with a

human voice.

"Babe, didn't I tell ya t' get offa my frequency?" It was the same male voice, speaking a multilated form of Anglo-western. And it was no more friendly than before: "Yer messin' th' hell outta my reception."

Since she had been monitoring this frequency and had heard no conversations, she assumed that this man's equipment and that of whomever he was conversing with was sufficiently directional to prevent her from hearing them. They—or *he*, at least—could hear her. And that was annoying him. That was good.

"Yes, you did," she said, "but I need help."

"An' I tol' ya, babe, I ain't got th' time. I got work t' do, me. Go cry somebody else's shoulder, huh?"

"There doesn't seem to be any others around."

"That ain't xactly my lookout."

"I believe you told me that before."

"Maybe ya didn't un'erstan' before, huh?"

The Lady Felice sighed silently to herself. "I did, but I still need your help." She paused, and then added, in her most lady-in-distress tone. "Please."

"An' ya still ain't gonna get it, *out-worlder*." The final word was a curse, an obscenity.

"I can stay on this frequency and keep interfering," she said, choosing the tone of her voice with great care, the exact mixture of defiance and plea.

"An' I can change over, see?"

She was silent for a few moments, preparing for her next question. "Do you have visual circuits?"

"What's t' t' ya?"

"I just wondered." Her voice sounded very young.

"Ya got somethin' t' show me,

huh?"

"Maybe." Just a touch of teasing.

"Babe, ya ain't got nothin' I wanna see."

She wondered. He could have broken off before now if he had wished.

"How can you be sure without looking?" she asked.

"Babe, ain't no outworlder woman got nothin' for me. Now get th' hell offa my frequency."

Was he interested? She wasn't sure.

For a moment she considered doing exactly what he asked her to do—getting off his frequency and trying another. But her transmitter was line-of-sight on most frequencies, and apparently Breakdown Heights didn't have a sufficient ionosphere for much back reflection of lower frequencies. It was at least possible that his was the one receiver on the planet she *could* contact, as far south as she was. He seemed to be her only choice.

"Please, can't you help me?" Her voice was young and fearful.

"What's it worth t me, babe?"

It sounded like a rhetorical question, but was it? Maybe she *was* creating some interest on his part.

"If you had visual maybe I could show you."

"I done tol' ya, babe. Even if ya was Galea Gleesen I wouldn't cross ten kilos for ya, outworlder."

"Then what's a lifeboat worth in salvage?" This was her trump. She had to play it carefully.

There was silence for a long while. She was half fearful that he had broken off contact, but the hum of his carrier remained on the air, signifying that his transmitter was on, if not modulated. Finally the man spoke again: "All depends."

"On what?" she asked; she knew she was walking on unsteady ground

now, but at least it was a beginning.

"On a couple a things." The man's voice was more thoughtful. "Will it fly?"

"I . . . I don't know," she said carefully. "I'm no pilot. It came down on computer."

The man muttered an obscenity. "An' ya claim yer alone?"

"Of course I'm alone," she said, her voice sounding anger. "If I had anyone else to help me do you think I'd ask you?"

The man muttered his obscenity again, then said, "If th' damn thing'll get in th' air it could be worth lots, babe. If not, then it ain't worth much of a damn. Not as much as it would cost t' haul th' damn thing outta there." He was silent again, perhaps thinking. "Look a here, babe," he said at last. "Now I got a hellofa lot a work t' do now. If you'll stay offa th' air for a while an' let me get it done I might talk t' ya. Okay, huh?"

The Lady Felice was silent for a moment, as if she too were thinking, though she had already worked out her thoughts. Then she answered. "Okay."

"A'right, babe," the man replied. "Keep yer receiver on. I'll call ya back when I can."

"Is that a promise?"

The man repeated his favorite obscenity and then there was a click as his carrier frequency died away.

The Lady Felice smiled a careful smile to herself, sat back in the command seat and inhaled an Odinese cigar to glowing. Maybe, just maybe. . .

THERE WAS LITTLE POINT in trying to fool herself, the Lady Felice saw after putting on the baggy, oversized spacesuit and going outside into the ice and wind to have a closer look at

the ruptured rear of the crashed lifeboat. The drive section was ripped open. A pile of radioactive material lay glowing on the naked rock from which it had melted the ice. The lifeboat's drive was gone! She knew that. To ever get it into the air again would cost a great deal of money and a great deal of work, plus an entire new propulsion system—which she doubted would be easily available on Breakdown Heights.

Whether there would be any way of carting the broken craft out of the mountains to some place where it could be rebuilt, was something she was not qualified to guess about, though the man had seemed doubtful about that kind of salvaging operation.

As she stood there with the wind whistling around her, snow and ice sweeping around her shielded legs, the Lady Felice knew that if she told the man the true condition of the boat he would never come. But if she didn't tell him, if she held out hope to him, perhaps he might come—though his reaction to seeing the ruin of the boat would certainly not be pleasant to encounter.

Neither would a year alone, waiting for starvation.

Well, she said to herself, a strange smile forming on her full lips, she could at least get him here. Then perhaps—who knows? She'd have to figure that out when the time came.

THE LADY FELICE STAVANGER took a great deal of time arranging her hair, in applying a small amount of makeup to her face and to certain other parts of her body. One way or the other, she would get the man to the boat.

She found, among the other emergency supplies of the boat, a small, deadly energy pistol. She carefully hid it under the command seat

where she felt that she could get to it easily should the need arise. Best to be prepared for all contingencies, she thought.

Then she took off the rest of her clothing, opened a fresh pack of Odinese cigars and sat down in the command seat before the boat's now almost useless console.

She waited.

over fifty standard years ago. . . it doesn't seem that long. . . when captain chain took me aboard the aventine and let me stay in his cabin. . . it was against the company rules. . . a ship's skipper taking his mistress aboard ship. . . letting her ride free. . . that was the last time i saw surya. . . wonder what ever become of my mother. . . i suppose she's been dead for years. . . how grand, how terrible it has all been. . .

The woman who now called herself the Lady Felice Stavanger remembered the years in the brothels of Lunaport, of the men who had used her body at the cost of a few credits, of what she had learned from the minds of those men as their bodies lay locked with hers, of how she had used that knowledge, of how she had become, eventually, the mistress of Charles Laseren, one of the most powerful men on old Earth and how she had barely escaped with her life during the Purge of '37 after the coup failed, how she had fled, eventually, to Cybele, how she had entered the service of Rebekka the Green, then only Mayor, and how valuable had been her ability to enter the minds of the men around Rebekka, how she finally came to be one of the few people Rebekka dared trust during her own rise to power, how. . .

It was such a long story, but short too, perhaps. In these days of the Es-

terhazy Treatments she could expect to live a lifetime two or three times as long as what had gone before, if she could. . . Oh, well, she'd just have to work that out when the time came.

A FULL FIVE HOURS had gone by since the end of their last conversation before the console's receiver decided to come to life again.

The Lady Felice was looking at the distant gorge and even more distant gray mountains, watching a storm of ice whip down through a pass between two great peaks, down across a glacier that must have been a kilometer wide, down into the cold darkness of a distant chasm. The tiny, pale orange sun of Breakdown Heights hung in an ice-gray sky, surrounded by a shimmering halo of ice crystals, lending to the scene an aura of age and gloom, of a time in the distant future when all the stars in the galaxy would be dying, when all the new warm and green worlds would be nothing but stone and ice. She remembered a few lines she had heard once, a few lines from a very ancient Earth poet, something Charles had once quoted and had stuck in her memory all these years. *How did it go?* "Cold the stars are, cold the earth is, Everything is grim and cold/Strange and drear the sound of mirth is/—Life and I are old." *What was his name, the man who wrote it?* Winter, William Winter, was it? *Winter, the winter of a man, of a world, of a universe.*

Oh, Felice, you're getting awfully philosophical in your old age.

The receiver crackled and the man's harsh voice said, "Ya listenin'?"

"Yes, I'm here," she answered. She felt a slight chill, as if she were a very young girl facing her first lover. She could hardly remember him now, her first lover, so long ago.

"I got m' visual fixed. I'm turnin' it on now. Ya can show me what it was ya wanted t' show me."

"Mine's already on," the Lady Felice said, smiling within herself, a smile, perhaps, of anticipated triumph. She felt that the position of the seat would give the 3-v scanner a good view of her, just about all of her. She hoped she would produce the desired effect.

A man, apparently alone, isolated, a miner or prospector, kilometers and weeks from women. . . well?

Her own 3-v tank began to glow, wavering and flickering for an instant, and then a clear image formed. She watched the man's face with curiosity.

"Okay, babe," he said, "I'm. . ." His words came to a stop and his mouth dropped open. His own tank must have resolved about that time. He did not speak again for a moment.

If he had not had Esterhazy Treatments, which she doubted, he was probably about thirty-five standard. He looked like a big man. His face was broad and harsh and etched with the lines of weathering like the stone face of a cliff. His was the brutal face of a man who had faced a brutal existence from the day of his birth, but his black eyes were not dull. They alone stood out from the rugged face that was covered with a three- or four-day's growth of brown beard. He was wearing some sort of fur jacket and hood. Behind him she could see the cluttered interior of a small hut.

"I'm Felice Stavanger," she said simply. She was no longer Cybelene nobility, not here on Breakdown Heights. The Lady Felice she was not. Felice she was.

"Yeah," the man said after a while, his tongue briefly touching his weathered lips. Then he smiled, showing yellowed teeth. "Mus' be pretty warm

inside 'at boat."

"It's quite comfortable," Felice replied, looking directly into his eyes, not trying to avoid his stare, nor blushing at it. Her feeling of discomfort was gone now.

"Ya ain't tryin' t' hide much, are ya, babe?"

"I thought you weren't interested in outworlder women."

He didn't answer for a moment. "Yer kinna skinny, ain't ya?"

"Not unless you're used to fat women."

"Stand up," the man commanded.

Felice nodded, stood up, stepped just a little further away from the scanner. She spread her arms out like a fashion model showing off the latest Terran creation, and then slowly turned around so that he could see all of her.

"Ain't too bad, babe," the man said after a while, though his eyes said more than that.

"Thank you."

"Sit down," he commanded again like a man who expected women to obey his orders.

Felice did as he said and got herself another cigar. She lay back in the chair and puffed it to glowing before she spoke again. "Shall we talk now?"

"Yeah, I guess so," the man said, nodding, the ghost of a smile on his lips, a glow hanging in his eyes. "I'll talk t' ya, babe. Name's Jac Hackersbill."

"I am glad to meet you, Jac."

"We ain't met yet, babe, not in person."

"I hope we do."

"We just might do that," Hackersbill said. "Tell me 'bout yer boat."

She told him what she knew about it, the cruiser it had been attached to, its type and class, the type of drive it

(had) had, everything she knew except the fact that it would never fly again.

When she finished he nodded. "Yep," he said. "Might be worth salvagin', maybe. If we can fly it outta there."

"And me?" Felice asked.

"Ya might be too, babe. I figure yer a part a th' deal, huh?"

"I'm offering you everything I've got," Felice said. "The boat and me. I don't want to stay out here."

"Okay, look, if I come in, th' boat's mine, free an' clear, no strings, right?"

"Right."

"An' what 'bout ya? Whatta ya want outta this?"

"I want transportation to a spaceport."

Hackersbill laughed. "There's only one spaceport on this planet, babe, an' it's one hell of a ways off."

"With the salvage of this boat you could afford to get me there."

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"Maybe yes." She had to play it all the way or he might begin to suspect.

"Maybe, babe. We'll see 'bout that."

"In the meantime," Felice said, "until you can get me there, I'll agree to—ah—be your mistress."

Hackersbill was silent for a while, looking at her. "A'right," he said at length. "Ya look like a good piece. Ya an' the boat. I'll see 'bout gettin' ya t' th' spaceport, but yer transportation off-planet's yer own lookout."

"Agreed."

"A'right, ya treat me right an' I'll treat ya right."

"That's all I expect."

"Okay. It's gonna take me a while," he said. "First I gotta tie up a few things and then I'm gonna have t' get a proper fix on ya. I got a two-man

mountain goat—that's a machine, not a animal—an' it'll take a few days t' get t' ya if yer anywhere near where I think ya are. Figure a week, week an' a half."

"Very well," Felice said.

Hackersbill looked at her for a moment, thoughtfully, puzzled. "Say, babe, how'd ya ever come t' get here in th' first place?"

Felice gave him a story that was partially true, true enough that he accepted it.

Then he looked at her a while longer, his lips in a faint smile, and finally broke the connection. His image faded from the 3-v tank.

IT WAS the next day, local time, before he called her again. Though she was technically dressed, she was hardly covered. She whetted his appetite for her a little more. She need all the advantages she could get.

"I'm gonna take a readin' on ya here," he said. "In 'bout six hours I'll call ya again an' take another readin'. This'll be from my 'goat' an' it ain't got no visuals. Keep yer transmitter on all th' time, babe. I gotta get ya pinpointed 'xactly if I'm ever gonna find ya."

"I understand," Felice said, giving him a thankful smile.

"Okay."

Six hours later he called her back, told her that he was taking a second reading on her transmitter from about thirty kilometers from his shack. When he got back to his shack that night he could figure her exact location. He wasn't as dumb as he looked, he told her, his voice almost friendly. He'd call her back the next day and tell her how soon he'd start out for her—and the boat.

Felice was satisfied, so far at least. There was no doubt at all that she

would get him to the boat. But she wondered what she would do then.

Pull the energy pistol on him and force him to take her to civilization? That hardly seemed a logical thing to do. It would surely take several days and there was no question that his physical strength was superior to hers, especially on this planet where the gravity was already becoming a strain on her. No, he would have ample opportunity to overpower her and disarm her long before they ever reached civilization—or whatever passed for civilization on Breakdown Heights.

Or would she simply shoot him down before he got a chance to act, take that "mountain goat" of his and. . . and what, my dear? Without his help, without his knowledge of the land, she'd simply have no idea how to find her way anywhere.

Damn my ignorance! she said to herself. *I know nothing about this planet.*

Hackersbill has to take me back willingly, because he wants to take me back. But how in all of T'zale's holy names am I going to be able to satisfy him when he sees the condition the boat is in?

Between now and then she was going to have to work out something that would satisfy him as well as a salvagable boat would, or she probably end up raped—or worse—and left alone in the boat with no prospects at all.

That night she slept little and thought long, looking up through the partially clear dome at the bright pinpoints of light in the dark sky. "Cold the stars are," she thought and shivered and pulled a blanket around her. "And cold the earth is."

When finally sleep did come, induced by the Sisterhood's Quivera

techniques, she dreamt she was a child again, running across the sunny fields of Surya, a warm, golden sun in the sky, soft green grass beneath her naked feet, and endless years of happiness before her.

The next day Hackersbill called her again from his shack. He knew where she was to within a kilometer. That was about a hundred and seventy kilometers almost directly south of his shack. If he left the day after tomorrow, as he planned, it would probably take him a week to reach the boat, considering the terrain he had to cover.

"Be lookin' for me in nine days, babe." There was warmth in his voice and a smile on his face.

"I will, Jac," she answered, "Oh, I will." There was a happiness in her voice she did not feel.

THEY COMMUNICATED BRIEFLY each day and Hackersbill told her of his progress south, describing to her the drab vistas through which he passed, the steep crags, the plunging chasms, and with each conversation he warmed to her, and though she could not see his face, she could hear the smile in his rugged voice.

She was winning him over. Until he reached the boat, at least.

At night she thought and wondered, planned and schemed, and still found herself at a loss. It seemed that her only hope was to throw herself on his mercy and hope that he would not abandon her—or kill her in a fit of rage she felt him very capable of doing.

She was wooing him, but she knew for certain that Hackersbill's primary concern was for the boat. It could make him a moderately rich man in terms of Breakdown Heights' economy, if it would fly out of there

under its own power. . . .

And during the nights she came very close to feeling the despair that she had promised herself that she would never feel again. And she felt very much like young Ulgana Kharr had felt in the presence of Captain Chain so long ago, so far away. What had become of the Lady Felice Stavanger who had fought her way from the whorehouses of Lunaport to become First Secretary of Cybele?

She wondered and she was a little frightened.

She did not want to die. She wanted to live very much.

But what of the rage of Jac Hackersbill?

ON THE MORNING of the ninth day, as Breakdown Height's dim, cold, orange sun slowly rose above the ragged fangs of the distant mountains, Felice Stavanger, recently the Lady Felice, First Secretary of Cybele, and before that Ulgana Kharr, whore, mistress, courtesan, knew exactly what to offer Jac Hackersbill—if he let her live long enough to offer it.

SHE REMEMBERED the strange effects she had seen in the sky the night before, the blazing aurora in the south that had grown up like a great serpent, climbing toward the sky to devour the stars, scintillating colors, flaming and changing as she watched. What had only been a small patch in the southeastern sky now expanded and grew brighter, growing into the folds of a curtain that seemed to cover the southern sky, undulating as if stirred by the hand of T'zale himself. Stars began to vanish as the aurora-curtain-serpent grew. It was as if some beautiful monster were rising to devour the universe. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the southern

aurora and its strange shapes dissolved, vanished, and the sky once again became black, spotted with bright stars. And Felice wondered if it had all really happened, or if it had been a dream, a nightmare of fear and dread and hope all mixed together.

IT WAS MIDDAY, Breakdown Heights time, when the receiver in the lifeboat's console came to life again.

"Felice," the voice said—he had come to call her that by now, that and even more intimate things.

"Yes, Jac," she answered.

"I got ya in sight."

"You do?" What did she feel? Delight? Fear? A mixture of both? She wasn't sure.

"Yeah, babe, look straight ahead. I'm 'cross th' gorge from ya. Ya oughtta be able t' see my 'goat'."

Peering through the snow and ice that now covered most of the dome she could see, across the gorge, a small, strange-looking object, a roughly egg-shaped car riding on an odd intermixture of legs and treads, clambering across the rough surface of the broken ice and stone.

"I see you, Jac." *Thank T'zale*, she thought, *he won't be able to see the drive until he's right on me.*

"Figure it's gonna take a hour or so t' get 'round th' gorge. Be waitin' for me, babe."

"I'll be waiting, Jac."

What else could she do? she wondered.

FELICE was wearing only the blouse with the Dramic "FS" on it and her yellow skirt. The blouse was not buttoned, but tied in a knot below her breasts, stretching the thin cloth tightly across them. The skirt was buttoned at her waist, but not zipped. She quite calmly accepted the fact

that she would at least be beaten and raped. She wanted to make it as easy for him—and for her—as possible. Therein lay her chance.

Then, practicing before the mirror, she put on her most meek and most terrified faces. Perhaps they would help some too.

She could only hope that she had teased him enough, that his lust would be greater than his rage. If not. . . .

The "mountain goat" came crawling, lumbering up out of the gorge, a very improbable looking device under more conventional circumstances, but one admirably suited for covering ground on the rugged mountains of Breakdown Heights. It was now coming straight toward the half-buried nose of the lifeboat. Hackersbill still could not see the tail section, the ruptured hull, the ruined drive, the drifts of snow that filled the tears in the metal.

Felice felt an unfamiliar sensation inside her, one she had not known for a long time, not since the Purge of '39 when she and a young pilot had fled for their lives in Charles Laseren's yacht—Charles had died in the streets of Geneva, shot down by the Chairman's bodyguard. And she realized that she did not have to pretend fear. It would be very real. Gone were the Machiavellian intrigues of Cybelen court life. This was naked brute force she faced, and of her ability to deal with that she was no longer sure.

The "mountain goat" was less than a dozen meters from the boat, past the jutting, fingerlike crag, when it began to slow, to swing around to its driver's right. She knew that Hackersbill was taking a good look at the crashed boat as he approached it.

A few meters more and then. . .

Now he could see it, she was sure,

the hole, the rip, the ruined drive, the spilled pile.

Her stomach was hollow and aching, her throat tight, her hands shook as she carefully placed her last cigar to her lips and forced herself to inhale.

Oh, T'zale, she said to herself, please let. . .

The "mountain goat" ground to a halt and for what seemed like a very long while it sat there motionless. There was no sign of its occupant.

What's he thinking? What's he doing?

A door swung open from the side of the battered metal egg atop the legs and treads. A metal ladder dropped to the packed ice upon which the machine stood. Wind whipped ice and snow around it. Then a figure appeared in the doorway, hooded and wrapped in bulky furs. There was something dark and heavy in its hand, something long barreled and sinister. She could not see it clearly, but she knew what it was. She had seen men die before.

For a moment her resolve almost broke. She almost ran to the command seat to get the energy pistol from its hiding place. She could get him first, before he got a chance to fire at her. She could open the hatch and blast him down before he turned. She could take the "goat" and . . . die somewhere out there trying to find her way to nowhere.

That was no answer.

The furred figure was on the ground now, turning, then crossing toward the boat with long strides, angry strides. She could not see his face because of the hood, but she could imagine his expression.

Felice stood in the center of the boat's single cabin. Waiting. The inside catches of the hatch had been re-

leased. All he had to do was hit the. . .

The hatch burst open and the figure of Jac Hackersbill, clothed in thick furs, a long-barreled pistol in his hand, his face a livid mask of rage, stormed in.

"Ya goddamn bitch," he yelled. "Ye lied a me. Ya said th' boat wasn't broke up."

"I . . . I," Felice found it almost impossible to speak. She needed no acting ability for this part. "If I'd told you, you wouldn't have come."

"Goddamn right I wouldn't a came, ya lyin' little. . ."

He had crossed the cabin, leaving the hatch standing open behind him, snow and ice and cold wind blowing in. His empty left hand was clenched in a fist. His right hand held the slug-throwing pistol.

Hit me, oh, hit me. . .

Hackersbill's left hand came up, swinging savagely.

The blow knocked her senseless, flinging her against the far wall. As she slid down the wall she lost consciousness for an instant.

When sensation and awareness returned to her, rough, gloved hands were ripping away her blouse, tearing at her skirt, and a brutal voice was saying, "Ya goddamn filthy lyin' . . ."

He hadn't used the gun, she thought. He hadn't used the gun.

"Yer gonna be sorry for this, babe," Hackersbill said, his voice harsh, rasping like his hands across her flesh. "Yer gonna wish ya never called me. Yer gonna scream. . ."

He lifted her to her feet for a moment, his hands digging into the soft flesh of her shoulders, brusing, almost breaking bones. A terribly cold wind blew through the open hatch across her naked body as he threw her to the deck savagely, as he ripped off his

thick furs, and brutally threw himself on her.

"First I'm gonna rape th' hell outta ya," he said, slashing her across the face with his open hand, "an' then, babe, I'm gonna. . ."

He raped her, savagely and brutally, taking his lust and his anger out on her body at the same time.

Under him Felice moaned, screamed in terror, tried to writhe away—and as he tore into the soft flesh of her body, she slipped into his mind and found what she wanted.

AT LAST—it seemed like a lifetime later, as it was in a sense—he rose from her, pulled his clothes around him and then kicked the hatch shut with a violent blow of his booted foot.

As he turned back to face her again, his eyes still burning with rage, Felice slowly rose on her elbows, licked the blood from her lips, looked defiantly into his eyes.

"John David Hackersbill," she said slowly with the voice of the woman who had been the First Secretary of Cybele, "before you kill me I want you to know what you're throwing away."

"Ya lousy lyin' bitch, I'll. . ."

"You are twenty-seven local years old," she went on slowly, holding him in place only with the power of her eyes and her voice. "Your father's name was Henri and your mother's name was Amathina. You have two older brothers, both of whom you hate, and a younger sister who is no better than a common whore for the mercenaries. You had another brother, younger than you, but he died two local years ago from head injuries received in a brawl. You lost. . ."

"What th' hell?" Hackersbill demanded, not seeming to comprehend

what she was saying.

"You lost the little toe of your left foot to frostbite last winter. The girl named Denise left you a week after you married her to run away with—"

"Shut up!" Whether Hackersbill yelled from rage or fear Felice did not know. Nor did he, probably. Yet he remained where he stood.

"I know everything there is to know about you, Jac," she said, smiling with broken lips. "I just read your mind. Do you understand that?"

"You dirty bitch. . ."

"You'll listen to me!" It was an order and he obeyed. "You came here hoping to salvage a lifeboat and acquire yourself a private whore. Well, I can give you a hell of a lot more than that. I can give you the world."

"Yer crazy."

"I can read minds, Jac," she said, slowly rising to her feet, still facing him, pinning him with her eyes. "I told you I'm a telepath."

"So?" He seemed to have lost all ability to act, all confidence in himself.

"Think of what you could do with that ability, Jac," she said slowly, her voice softening. "Think of what we could do together with it."

"Together?"

She nodded slowly and smiled to him again, a warm, inviting smile that seemed to negate the brutal act that had gone before.

Then she explained to him very carefully how she could help him have anything he had ever wanted. How she could read minds for him, how he could use the information she gathered, how with her telepathic ability and his physical strength and knowledge of this world, together they could rule Breakdown Heights.

Most of it was lies, of course.

(cont. on page 131)

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The author of last issue's "Sight of Proteus" now turns his attention to crime—and its scientific detection—in three short stories collectively titled—

MURDER IN TRIPLICATE

CHARLES SHEFFIELD

Illustrated by Richard Olsen

The words "experimental form" are enough to make most readers blench. They usually imply a literary experiment, conducted at the expense of plot, narrative and story appeal. So I am a little reluctant to say that these three stories represent an experiment; but they do.

They are an attempt to break a tradition in writing mystery stories, by combining certain elements of science fiction with the usual who-dun-it. In each story, the resolution depends on simple scientific facts or theories, readily available to the reader. Although suggesting the who-dun-it form, they are more concerned with how than who or why.

Writing science fiction mysteries presents peculiar problems. If a story is set in the future, then magical (scientific) methods may be available to either commit or detect a crime—but use of those would be a deus ex machina, rousing the righteous wrath of the reader. So let me say at the outset that no such devices are used in resolving these mysteries. The science involved in the solutions is current science.

I hope that the reader will at least pause before the final pages of each story, and take two minutes trying to come up with his or her own solutions.—Charles Sheffield

THE TRILL

MORE THAN two thousand people attended the Wolf Trap Opera when Lola Carmez made her sensational appearance in Garaki's *Florence Nightingale*. It was a sell-out crowd. I couldn't get a ticket to that first night, nor to the second night performance when Lola died, on-stage before the packed house. But I was at the Opera

House on the third day, when the mystery unravelled.

Don Shackley had called me when it looked as though he was a prime suspect. I live in Washington, and I have pretty good contacts if you're in a fix. I'd known Don for fifteen years, since the days when we worked on the bilateral agreements for shared orbital hospital research facilities. Don covered the technical issues and



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I had handled the legal ones. We kept fairly well in touch, but I didn't know he'd been caught in Lola's web until he called me the morning after her death. Don wasn't a musician, but Lola collected famous men—especially the hero-adventurer types—the way other people collect stamps or rare coins.

I'd heard only a brief news headline, announcing Lola's on-stage collapse but giving no details. Don's news was quite a shock.

"Lola was murdered, Tom," he said. "When it happened, we thought she'd had a heart attack or a stroke. She seemed to faint just before the end of her last aria, at the climax of the whole opera. But the doctor took one look at her, and they called in the police. She was poisoned, with some kind of gas from a bouquet that she was holding."

Poisoned flowers were like something straight from a nineteenth century penny dreadful, but it wasn't quite the way I first thought of it. The gas came not from the flowers, but from a small cylinder concealed within the bouquet. Since Don had handed Lola the bouquet himself, there was good reason for his worry and concern.

"Only four people were anywhere near that bouquet after it was delivered from the stage florist," said Don. "Not counting Lola, I mean. There was Ilo Garaki—he was all over the place, fussing about the way the opera was being presented. Then there were Franz Messer, Jake Lazlo, and me—and I think I'm in the worst position, because there's no proof that the others touched the bouquet at all."

An impressive group. Franz Messer, marine biologist and undersea explorer; Jake Lazlo, champion jockey

and inventor; and Don himself, ex-astronaut and rising political technocrat. As I said, Lola liked to latch on to celebrities. And I knew her habits very well.

"Were you sleeping with her, Don?"

He didn't like the question, but after humming and hawing for a minute he admitted that he had been.

"How about Franz Messer and Jake Lazlo?"

"Recently, you mean?" Don sounded outraged. "What sort of person do you think Lola was? I'm sure she couldn't have been having an affair with either of them."

Don didn't know his Lola very well. Her changes of bed-partners were so frequent and so complex that "lovers" was the wrong word to describe her conquests. Although she was in her mid-forties, Lola's appetite was if anything increasing with age, and variety of diet was very much her style.

Ilo Garaki was a more complex case. Fifteen years earlier, he and Lola Carmez had enjoyed a famous and fiery union, following the great success of *Emily Bronte* and *Lady Jane Grey*, for which Garaki had written Lola spectacular starring parts. After a few years, the clash of their egocentric personalities had driven them apart. The news media had had a field day, gloating over their public spats and final legal battles.

Following the separation, they continued to build their separate careers, but Lola never again sang in a Garaki opera—until the powers-that-be at Wolf Trap, displaying an unusual naiveté, had commissioned Garaki to write an opera for the opening of the new Opera House, and had contracted for Lola Carmez to sing the lead part. Or maybe they weren't

naive at all. It was rumored that Lola was well past her peak, and Garaki was spiteful enough to write a part that would make that fact clear to the world. Washington likes that kind of rumor. Packed houses would be guaranteed, full of people who didn't know Bach from Bartok but who thrived on society gossip.

I'd heard Lola sing many times, from her first appearance at the New York Met, then around the world whenever our schedules happened to coincide. Yes, I was on Lola's list of bedmates for a while. How else do you think I could be so sure of her habits and her tastes? I'm neither a hero nor an adventurer, but, as I said, Lola liked variety.

In her youth, she had a wonderful voice, rich as cream in the lower and middle register, smoothly up to a clear, bell-like soprano. Her most famous parts called for a big range and a good deal of coloratura vocal gymnastics. The last time I had heard her sing had been about a year ago, at Covent Garden. The rumors were right. I could remember Lola's high notes in her best years very well. They sang like stroked crystal. Now they were scratchy, a little strained. Somewhere, the bell had a slight crack in it. Lola would have to begin picking her parts with care.

Ilo Garaki knew this, much better than I did. The part written for Lola in *Florence Nightingale* was a luscious one. It provided a succession of glorious melodies for the middle and lower register of her range, where she still sounded as smooth and rich as velvet. But then, at the very end of the third act, Florence's final aria took off for the vocal stratosphere. In its closing bars, there was a last, upward run, with no orchestral accompaniment. It went almost an octave fur-

ther than before, to an F above top C, trilled on that note for five seconds, then was joined by a single flute for a couple of seconds more, before the full orchestra entered. Nothing could have been written by Garaki that would so cruelly reveal any failings of Lola's voice, in intonation, control or range. At the final rehearsals, according to Don Shackley, Lola had taken the final run and trill an octave lower. She said she was saving her voice for the actual performance. Ilo Garaki had made no comment.

As I said, I wasn't at the opening night's performance myself, and I had to settle for second-hand reports and the critics' written comments. Lola had staggered everyone—the orchestra, the audience, and, no doubt, Garaki. She had sung her part to perfection, up to the end of her final aria. Then she had taken the final upward run with ease and sang a sustained, incredible trill on the high F, until the flute at last came in to join her. The performance was stunning, and the brilliance of tone in the last high phrase had all the critics reaching for new descriptive metaphors. At the final curtain Lola basked in tumultuous applause—and Garaki looked less happy than one might have expected. I found the reports hard to swallow. I had heard Lola sing in London, and I would have sworn that she could not have performed her final aria the way the critics said.

According to Don, the second night had been much the same. A flawless performance right to the end of the third act. Then, just before her final phrase, a sudden collapse, while the audience was waiting, completely hushed, to hear a repeat of yesterday's uncanny upward run and final

trill.

"Look, Don," I said. "I'll get out to Wolf Trap as soon as I can, but I want to find out a bit more about the others who could have handled the bouquet. Are you sure no one else could have got near it?"

"Positive. Garaki, Messer, Lazlo and I were all standing in the wings, on the left side. The other performers during that part of the opera had entries and exits from the other side."

"How about stage hands?"

"Not near our group. Garaki would have chased them away. He's a madman when it comes to staging his work."

"I know. I've been around Ilo long enough. He's a classic manic-depressive, way up or all the way down. How's he doing now?"

"I think he's on tranquillizers. Has been since the first night performance. No one's been able to get much out of him, and he just stands around looking half-stoned."

"How about the others? How are they taking it?"

"You should come and take a look for yourself. Neither of them shows much on the surface. Franz Messer's one of these strong, silent types—good choice to play Siegfried."

"I know Franz. I helped him incorporate one of his underwater dome projects a couple of years ago. He's a brave man. You know, he used himself as a guinea pig on experiments to improve decompression treatment for underwater work."

"I didn't, but it's no surprise. Lola used to call him the human fish, and said she was the only thing on land that he cared about. He wasn't there most of yesterday. He had a TV show."

That also was no surprise. Franz had spent most of his life promoting

and developing the underwater dome-cities. He was a great TV performer, a natural. His projects always needed money, and he was always trying to raise more. Lola's death must have been a bad blow. She had been scheduled to go on a big fundraising tour with him, and the papers had been full of advance publicity—Nordic hero and Latin beauty, it made a good combination.

"I don't know why Lazlo hung around," went on Don. "Except that I suppose Lola was too kind-hearted to send him packing. He's a very smart guy, but have you seen him? He's practically a midget."

Don was letting jealousy show through. Jake Lazlo was short, thin and small-boned. Don could have fought a grizzly bare-handed, and Franz could have given Don or the grizzly a pretty hard time. But Jake left them both standing when it came to brains, and he had plenty of courage himself. His delicate hands were equally deft with the reins of a galloping horse, or the exact setting of a precision lathe.

What would Lola have seen in him? Money—mostly from his racing wins—and an increasing reputation as an inventor. He had patented devices as diverse as dental drills that worked better 'around corners', or mechanical hoes that could weed, dig, remove rocks and grade soil with minimal human intervention.

Like Franz—like me, like all the rest of us—Jake had been bowled over by Lola and she had simply swept him up in her wake. You could find almost any physical or mental type in her entourage at one time or another.

"I don't deny his brains," went on Don grudgingly. "He's told us of five or six ways you could rig a gas cylin-

der to release at a certain time, or from a distance."

"I'd like to hear that," I said. "Sit tight until I can get out there."

Don Shackley had managed to get word to the uniformed officers outside the Wolf Trap Opera House that his legal advisor was on the way, so I got in through an unusually tight guard without much trouble. I hadn't seen so many policemen in one spot since Senator Bell was assassinated inside the Capitol. The heat was on, and I was not at all surprised, but very pleased, to find that Juan Mercedes was in charge of the investigation.

Juan and I are old friends, and close friends—as close as you can get with your guard up. His job was to catch criminals. Mine, depending on circumstances, was to help or hinder him. At least, that's the way he viewed it, even though he recognized that what I did was strictly legal. We dined together once a month, alternating American and Mexican cuisine, but sticking to Chilean wines and Havana cigars.

My arrival didn't surprise Juan. The murder had happened fourteen hours earlier. By now, he would have a full dossier on all his leading suspects, going all the way back to their schooldays. My earlier ties to Don wouldn't have escaped his attention.

Business was business. Juan nodded to me, and I formally requested counsel with Don. We were allowed to use a small dressing-room, back-stage. Don was unshaven and black under the eyes. It was a fair guess that he'd had no sleep.

"We've got just a few minutes," I said. "Then they want to run through last night's performance."

Don shuddered. "Again? We've already been through it four times. Does Mercedes know what he's do-

ing?"

"You bet. If you've nothing to hide—I assume you don't, at least about Lola's death—then you'd best tell Mercedes every last thing. He isn't interested in your sex life and he's not a man to make moral judgments. He wants to catch his murderer, and that's all. Now, bring me up to date. What have you been doing since last we met?"

Don had spent most of the past two years working on the satellite power system, either in Houston or supervising construction twenty-two thousand miles above the Atlantic. He had met Lola at a Washington whirl given to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the opening of the National Air and Space Museum. That was three months ago, and he had been in Washington since then. She had fluttered her long eyelashes (artificial—but as I knew all too well, by the time you saw her remove them she had also removed enough other things that you were trapped completely). Don had fallen.

"I was going to arrange a shuttle ride up to synchronous orbit for her," he said. "She said she'd always wanted to go into space."

I was surprised. "You couldn't do that, could you?"

"No." He shook his head, and smiled ruefully. "I'd been wondering how I'd ever tell Lola that. I'd been putting it off for weeks."

I was sympathetic. Lola thwarted was not a pretty sight.

"I suppose that's not much of a motive for murder, though," Don went on. "I'm most worried about the fact that I'm the one who handed her that damned bouquet. They keep harping on that."

"Did you get a good look at it? See the cylinder, maybe?"

He shook his head. "Didn't look for it. It was just a bunch of flowers, as far as I was concerned. I just happened to be standing near the table when she came off-stage for it, and I simply picked it up and handed it over to her."

Our time was up. Two uniformed men led us back to the stage. I was settled in the front row of the stalls, with a warning that I'd be thrown out if I didn't keep my mouth shut, and Don took up a position in the wings, with Garaki, Lazlo and Messer. They looked a very miserable quartet: Don and Frank Messer, tall and blond, standing like a pair of bookends with Ilo Garaki and Jake Lazlo, short and dark, between them.

The orchestra and the cast were in position. Juan Mercedes spoke, from the back of the theater.

"One more time, ladies and gentlemen." There was a communal sigh. I suspected that Juan had said that before. "Let us have the exact events, as you remember them. This time, we will use a recording made at the first night's performance. I would like the orchestra to watch the stage closely, instead of playing. Think of what you saw and heard last night, and tell me if anything is different now from the way that you remember it."

The overture for the third act of *Florence Nightingale* began. Lush and melodious, but with the thin edge of obsessive madness that Garaki could suggest so well. As the cast moved through the stage reconstruction, I found myself wondering what the heroine of the Crimea would have thought if she could have moved forward in time to view the scene before me.

While her understudy mimed her way through the part, Lola's radiant

voice released a riot of memories within me. The music, set for the splendid lower and middle range of her voice, could not have been better sung by any living soprano. There was all the ease, control and color that I remembered. Of course, the real test was still to come, when Lola must reach for the high register that had begun to fail her in recent years.

The understudy walked off-stage. Don handed her the bouquet that she needed for the final scene. She returned for the final, tragic aria. The music was swelling to a great peak, with undertones of madness and despair tugging and swirling around Lola's voice. Finally, after a shattering climax on percussion and brass, the orchestra ceased. The understudy bent her face to the bouquet and stood for a long moment, motionless. Then she raised her head, and Lola sang an electrifying, perfect upward run to a final, impossible trill. The tone, timbre and attack were stunning. After an incredible five seconds, the solo flute entered, then at last the rest of the orchestra came in and moved to the disturbing, dissonant ending.

While the police moved among the orchestra and the cast on-stage, I was absorbed in a mystery of my own. The Lola I had heard in London could not—simply could not—have sung that final run and trill. The human voice is a remarkable organ, but some changes are irreversible. Also, there was something about the clear remarkable tone of the trill . . .

I couldn't sort my thoughts out properly. After a few minutes, I risked expulsion from the hall and walked quietly round to Garaki, still standing in the wings. We had met long ago, before and after his marriage to Lola. He nodded at me, but

did not speak.

"Ilo," I began, "The part you wrote for Lola is magnificent. But that last phrase—you know her voice, and its condition. How could she have sung it? Could she have managed that last run and trill?"

He turned, giving me his full attention for the first time. At last he spoke. "There was no way. She could not sing it." He shook his head, then turned back to the stage. "There was no way she could sing it like that. Then, she sang it. I saw her, I heard her."

He was in shock. But was it at the fact of her death, or at her singing before her death?

I made my way back to the stalls. I knew just how Ilo Garaki felt. Up on the stage, an argument was going on between Lola's understudy and the orchestral conductor, and at the back of the hall where Juan Mercedes had been sitting there was a huddle of police.

The understudy had been holding the bouquet in her left hand, with her right hand touched to her cheek. The conductor insisted that during the last part of the area, Lola had held the bouquet in *both* hands. They went on arguing, until at last Juan Mercedes moved forward from the back of the hall and stood in front of me. If possible, he looked even more surprised and shocked than Garaki. He waved his hands to cut off the argument.

"You are both right," he said. His tone was bitter and perplexed. "The stage directions call for one hand on the cheek. But Miss Carmez held the bouquet in both hands. I know it, because our laboratory report on the instrument of her death has just reached me."

He turned unhappily to face Don and the other possible suspects,

standing in the wings. "Gentlemen, I was badly mistaken. Last night, and this morning, it seemed clear to me that we were dealing with a case of murder. Our laboratory report indicates that it was suicide."

He paused, aware how implausible his words sounded. I felt it, too. Suicide, in her hour of triumph—that was not Lola. "As you know," went on Juan, "the lethal gas was in a small cylinder. It apparently was controlled by just a simple valve. There was no timing device, and no way it could have been opened from a distance. Lola Carmez opened it herself. To do so, she needed to hold the bouquet in both hands."

There was a total silence. Franz Messer stood with his eyes closed. Next to him, Don Shackley and Jake Lazlo stared blankly out across the stage. I knew what their feelings must be: relief, mixed with incredulity. Lola would rage, despair, she might even *say* she would kill herself. But do it?—never.

I could imagine how Juan must be feeling. It didn't smell right, but he couldn't argue with the lab report. I left the theater, got into my car, and drove slowly back to my office in downtown Washington. I'm sure I was a menace to traffic. The sound of Lola's voice rang in my ears, pulling at my memory. And finally, as I drove, I was able to ask myself the correct question—and answer it. For the first time in my life, I wished that I had a telephone in my car. Instead of going to the office, I headed for the FBI Building, and Juan Mercedes.

He had made better speed than I had. He was sitting at his desk when I arrived, a sprawl of papers before him. He was looking for something that would turn suicide into murder, but I didn't think that he would find

it. He needed two facts that he didn't have. By luck or accident. I had both.

He waved me to a seat and shrugged, hands raised in Mexican style. "I made a fool of myself, Tom. Your friend is free, and you are here to gloat."

"Not quite. I'm here to give you your murder, and your murderer."

"Of Lola Carmez?" His brown eyes suddenly went right through me. I felt glad that I was not a suspect.

"Yes. You'll have to do an awful lot of legwork, though, before there can be any chance of an arrest."

"What else are a policeman's feet for? I missed something, didn't I, Tom? I thought I must have, but I couldn't see it."

"No. You couldn't. You were looking in the wrong place, and at the wrong time."

He was puzzled, and had every right to be. "So, what are the right place and time?"

"The first night, when Lola sang that F in *altissimo* trill. You were concentrating on the second night, when she died. You knew, did you, that her voice was failing on the highest notes?"

"Garaki said that to me. But she sounded like diamonds and pearls, to my ears."

"On the recording you played, she certainly did."

"And you say we looked at the wrong place?"

"In a way. You should have been looking at Franz Messer's domed cities, on the continental shelf."

"You are suggesting that Messer is the murderer?"

"That's right. You'll have to dig for the proof, but I can tell you the method, and guess at the motive."

"That's a lot more than we've got now. I'll need some convincing."

Juan was looking skeptical, but he reached into his left hand desk drawer and pulled out two Havanas. I was getting through to him.

"Tell me, Tom," he repeated. "What did I miss?"

"Look at your notes. Garaki told you Lola's voice wasn't what it used to be. A lot of people must have told you the two of them didn't get along. Did Garaki tell you when he completed the score for *Florence Nightingale*?"

"It's in here." He looked at his notebook. "He finished it a month and a half ago, and he handed out the parts for study on June 20th."

"So Lola knew, more than a month before the first performance, that Garaki had written a piece, at the climax of the opera, that she dare not sing, with her failing highest notes."

"Why didn't she simply go to Garaki, and ask him to change it, then?"

"He probably expected her to. And I can guess what he'd have done: He'd have made a big fuss about it, and made sure that everyone knew Lola was asking him to ruin his masterpiece—that's how he'd have put it—just because the top notes of her voice were no good. He can be very nasty, old Ilo."

"But she didn't go to him—and she *did* sing it, Tom. Garaki will swear to that, and so will two thousand other people."

"I know. Garaki hasn't got over that yet. You see, just when Lola must have been in despair, one of her admirers—Franz Messer—was smart enough to realize the source of her troubles. He came to Lola and suggested a possible solution to the problem with the final aria."

"He could cure the problem she was having with her voice?"

"Not a cure. No one could do that. A temporary solution. One that worked because Garaki had confined his spite to that final, soaring phrase of the opera. Messer said he'd help Lola—for a price, I imagine."

"Sex?"

I laughed. "You obviously didn't know Lola. She wouldn't sell sex—she gave it away. No, Messer wanted Lola to help him raise money for his latest underwater dome project. It's on the rocks—financially, not literally. I'm guessing this of course, but I think she agreed to help him, and he went ahead and got the equipment they needed for secret preparation and practice. You see, it had to be done in secret."

Juan put down his cigar and chewed at his lower lip. "You're making some pretty wild statements, my friend. What equipment? Why do you pick on Messer, and not Shackley or Lazlo?"

"I'm coming to that. The equipment was a small cylinder, full of a mixture of oxygen and helium. It was placed inside the bouquet that Lola carried for the final scene—and she had it there on the *first* night. In the seconds before she sang that final upward run and high trill, she bowed her face to the bouquet, opened the valve, and breathed her lungs full of the mixture. Then she sang the run and the trill."

Juan's face was a picture of bewilderment. "An oxygen and helium mixture would improve her voice?"

"No. It's not a medicine. Lola had her lungs full of the mixture, then she sang the phrase in her *middle register*, and octave lower—it's still marvellous, unaffected by age. Helium is a very light gas. As it moves past the vocal chords, the sound that is produced is *raised in pitch*. It must have

taken lots of practice and experiment to get the mixture and the pitch just right—but remember, they had lots of time, and Lola had great voice control. Remember, too, that Lola took the run and the trill an octave lower in rehearsal."

I could see that Juan was unconvinced. "Are you telling me that *anyone* could sing higher, just by taking a breath of helium?" he asked.

"I am. If you don't believe me, go out and buy a toy helium-filled balloon. I happen to know it, because I've been to the undersea domes—and Franz Messer knows it a whole lot better, and has easy access to helium. You see, they use an oxygen-helium mixture in diving, to help avoid 'the bends' that come from pressure changes. Everyone there sounds like Donald Duck, all high-pitched. Messer must remember my underwater visits, from the time when we were incorporating one of his undersea projects. It must have been a bit of a shock when he saw me come in today—he couldn't have known I was there at Don Shackley's request."

Juan was silent, drawing thoughtfully on his Havana. I knew that before the day was over he would be experimenting, personally, with a cylinder of helium. "And the motive?" he said at last.

"More guesswork, I'm afraid. Lola had promised to help Franz Messer, but that was when her career wasn't looking too good. Then she had that huge first-night success, and her career was back into high gear. I think she casually broke her promise, without even thinking too much about it. You see, Lola was like that—she never really understood that other people mattered, too. For the second night's performance, poor Franz

found an alternative to helium."

I stopped talking and sat enjoying my cigar, watching Juan juggle his facts and my guesses. "We can take it from here," he said at last. "It's a lot of legwork, as you said, checking times, equipment, and sources. If Messer did get the helium from his own undersea projects, we can probably trace it. And if Lola told him she'd be unavailable to help his fundraising, there may even be witnesses to that. From what you've said, she wouldn't worry too much if she broke her promise to him in public." He sighed. "I never knew her, but I guess Lola was a bitch—a great, glorious bitch."

I had nothing to add. If we were devising an epitaph, I couldn't have phrased it better myself.

IT WOULD BE NICE to stop right there, and call it the end; but the next day—as I had expected—I had a call from Juan. You don't have his job unless you are disgustingly thorough.

"Messer confessed," he said. "And you, my legal friend, are a sneaky bastard, or a lucky one."

"Sneaky?" My wounded innocence would have fooled most people. "All I did was tell you who your murderer was."

"Sure you did—and your client was automatically off the hook. You didn't choose to tell me—though I'm convinced you knew it very well—that construction of the orbital hospital facilities is done using an enriched oxygen-helium atmosphere, at reduced pressure. Don Shackley still has free access to the spacelab installations. He had the means to hand, as easily as Messer did. Why didn't you suggest he'd killed Lola?"

I sighed. "Juan, it's easy to tell you don't work in the private sector. How

long do you think I'd stay in business, if I started accusing my own client—the man who's paying me to defend him?"

His only answer was a disapproving sniff.

A sniff is, sometimes worth a thousand words—yet Juan is, by any measure, a very smart man. When will people learn that the business of a lawyer is law, not justice?

FROM NATURAL CAUSES

LIKE DROPLETS of acid, envy had eaten slowly into the soul of John Laker. On the day that the shell of his soul was completely eroded he killed Alan Gifford; and on that day the time of true suffering began.

The murder occurred in late September but the first taste of acid had come on a perfect June day more than twenty years earlier. Laker saw the world then through a dark haze. Tight bands of pain were closing about his chest as he went round the final bend and on into the straight, clenching his jaws and pushing towards the finishing tape. As he passed it his senses could record only one thing. Alan Gifford, on his right—and half a pace ahead. The friendly arm that held his panting body after the race was Gifford's.

That scene set the pattern for the school years. Alan Gifford and John Laker, track stars—but always in that order. It didn't help Laker to know his times easily beat those of champions of previous years. Somehow that made it worse. In the single year when Laker swept the board in track events, the sight of Gifford in the crowd, weak from an appendicitis operation but cheering Laker on, turned victory to ashes. Next year Gifford

was again an agonizing half stride ahead.

College brought no relief. John Laker was a good engineering student and he did well, very well. But Gifford was an engineer too, and seemed always to win the top design prize or get extra credit for originality. By the time they left college John Laker was an obsessed and tormented man.

"What next, John?" asked Gifford on the last day of school.

"Probably a government job. AEC maybe. That's my strongest suit. How about you?"

"Still not sure. I've had a good offer from the Bureau of Standards. See you in Washington, by the look of things." He slapped Laker on the back and headed off across the noisy campus.

In the years that followed the two men ran across each other about every couple of months. Alan Gifford had no idea how closely John Laker followed his career—raises, promotions, new responsibilities. He didn't know there was an unannounced and one-sided competition. Laker resented every success Gifford achieved, was wounded by each sign of his progress. Each year the burn went a little deeper.

The murder when it came was unplanned, almost an accident. Laker, walking from the bus stop to his house, met Gifford in the street. On an impulse he asked him in for a drink.

"This your place?" said Gifford in surprise as they turned into the driveway. "I'd no idea you lived in such luxury. How much land do you have, a couple of acres?"

"A bit more." Laker looked at Gifford, hoping at last to see a sign of envy. There was only simple pleasure at the beauty of the handsome red

brick Colonial and well-kept garden.

They went on into the house. Laker saw their reflection in the full-length mirror by the hall coat stand. Grey-haired, lined with bitterness, he looked the older man by ten years. Envy and grinding work had taken their toll. Gifford went to the living-room window and stood looking out over the smooth lawn and carefully tended flower beds.

"You do a first-rate job out there, John," he said. "Wish I could get my garden to look like that."

Laker came over to the window and looked out absently. "That's my gardener. He comes in every day. I don't seem to find the time to do much there myself." He had forgotten the breadth of Gifford's interests. Gifford was an enthusiastic amateur gardener, as he seemed to be an enthusiastic everything else. "What are you doing over this side of town, Alan? I thought you were still living in Arlington."

Gifford nodded. "I am. Right on the approach path to National Airport, I think. I came over here to see Don Thomson at the Arboretum. Remember him from the University? He was mad about plants even then. Has the ideal job and spends all day playing about with new varieties of flowers."

Laker smiled. "Sure, I remember him. All teeth and topsoil." He poured their drinks and shrugged. "Should get over there myself, but you know how it is—something's only half a mile away, you figure you can see it anytime—so you never do."

"You should. There's no place like it for plant collections. Don would love to show you round."

As he spoke, Gifford was strolling slowly round the room, sipping his drink and admiring the furniture and

elegant china. He shook his head ruefully. "You've got taste *and* money. You know, Jean's illness used up most of my reserves."

His wife had died three years before after a long illness. Gifford had cared for her until the end, giving his days and nights to the struggle. Childless, he lived alone. Laker, driven from within, had never married and also lived by himself. The furnishings of the house had been decided by his married sister, indulging a taste beyond her own means.

Gifford looked at his watch. "Better begin the trek home. No, I won't have another, I've got to fight the Beltway traffic. But I'd like to take a look at your garden on the way out."

"Sure. Pity the gardener's not here. He could tell you what everything is a lot better than I can."

In the big front garden they walked slowly from one flower bed to another in the early evening sunshine. Gifford kept up a running commentary.

"That's going to be a great show of chrysanthemums in another couple of months. These dahlias are show standard. Ah, now. Here's the sign of a real professional." He stopped before a flower bed set back about fifteen yards from the front double gates. "He's double digging there. Must be two feet deep, that trench. I always swear I'll do that but I never get round to it. It makes all the difference to the soil."

As they approached the hot-house Laker felt a lump in his chest. When they paused before a tray of seedlings the truth hit him like a hammer blow. He had bought the house to compete with Gifford, to show the world he was richer, more successful. But Gifford was finding more pleasure there in one evening than Laker had ever found.

The world turned red, the last drop of acid found the center of his soul. He lifted a heavy claw hammer sitting by the boxes of seedlings. Alan Gifford fell. John Laker's real torment began.

THE FIRST HOURS were a frenzy of activity. When darkness fell he carried Gifford's body in a wheelbarrow to the deep trench in the front garden. A crescent moon gave just enough light to drop it in and cover it with a foot and a half of topsoil. Then he went again and again over the house and garden to remove all evidence of Gifford's visit. The cleaning woman arrived at eight the next morning and found him slumped in an armchair in the living room, eyes fixed on the flower beds. He roused himself to call his office and explain he was sick, then call his gardener and give him a month's wages in lieu of notice. He had, he explained, a relative down on his luck who needed the job. No need to come by, he would have the gardener's tools sent over to him.

The next few days were spent in mindless waiting. Nothing happened. After a week he had a new problem. He could allow no one to work on the garden, especially the front flower beds.

"When's the gardener coming back?" asked his cleaning woman. "It's getting really raggy out there."

"I'll be doing it myself. Doctor's idea. Thinks I can do with the fresh air and exercise."

That was easily accepted. He did indeed look terrible. First thing in the morning and last thing at night his thoughts went to the flower bed and the hidden body. At four in the morning he would wake from a recurring dream. Alan Gifford's arm had risen from the home-made grave and

was pointing up, visible from the street. Each time he had a compulsion to get up and go out into the garden. It was no more than a nightmare—but sleep came hard after it.

Fall turned slowly to winter. He was forced to work on the garden himself, raking leaves, cleaning up withered raspberry canes and dry iris stems. At first he was clumsy and inefficient. He read books and consulted his acquaintances on the theory and practice of gardening. For the first time since early youth envy and work were not the twin centers of his life. In their place had come concealment of his crime. This meant constant tending of the garden and private grave.

Evenings and week-ends now were spent working outside. "It's doing him a lot of good, working in the garden," the cleaning woman told her sister. "He's getting some color in his cheeks. The best advice his doctor could have given him, I'd say."

Winter came and work on the yard slowed. Then the first promise of spring and renewed frantic activity. Little by little, the slow pulse of the seasons was marking its rhythm in John Laker. His mental agony grew less, fear of discovery gave way to understanding of the motive for the crime and remorse at his actions. Spring became summer and the garden exerted its healing influence. Alan Gifford's grave was a bright mass of flowers, planted and tended by Laker's careful hands.

Eleven months after Gifford's death, in mid-August, it came. A polite, neatly-dressed man was waiting for Laker when he returned from work one Friday evening.

"Mr. John Laker? My name is Porson." He presented his credentials.

"With your permission I'd like to ask you a few questions regarding the disappearance of Alan Gifford."

Laker felt the lifting of a long-held burden. "Let's go inside. I think I can help you in your inquiry."

When they came out half an hour later John Laker stopped by the coat rack to pick up a jacket. He expected to be away some time. His reflection in the full-length mirror showed a grey-haired, tanned man, relaxed and fit. On their way to the front gate the two men stopped briefly by the front flower bed, soon to be disturbed by police officials.

"Tell me one thing would you," said Laker. "How did you find out? And what took you so long?"

"You can't rush Nature, Sir." Porson turned again to the flower bed. "The day he disappeared Alan Gifford had visited a friend, Mr. Donald Thomson, at the Arboretum down the road from here. Thomson knew Gifford liked gardening so he gave him a couple of bulbs from the flower he'd been developing. A new variety of stem-rooting lily—dwarf, with crimson flowers.

"Thomson never saw that flower growing anywhere outside the Arboretum test beds—until he walked past your house last week on a lunchtime stroll. He knew Gifford had disappeared. After stewing on it for a few days he called us.

"A stem-rooting lily likes to be planted good and deep." Porson pointed at the flower bed, where a brilliant Turk's Head contrasted sharply with the array of bright annuals. "As you see, it comes up through eighteen inches of good soil with no trouble at all."

As they left Laker took a last look round. His eyes had an inward-looking and peaceful expression.

"I hope the prison has a garden," Mr. Porson," he said.

The years of contentment were beginning for John Laker.

HUMPTY-DUMPTY DEATH

THE HEAVENS themselves blaze forth the death of princes.' On that basis, Luther Carter's murder called for some rare celestial pyrotechnics. And indeed, the death of the richest man in the State had considerable effects, the first being a sleepless night for a lot of people, including me.

The news reached us as we were celebrating, if that word applies, the solution of a case in which \$700,000 of embezzled State funds had been recovered and a murderer caught. Senator Richard Brand had arranged a small dinner party at his house in my honor. The other guests had left and the two of us were lingering over brandy and cigars when he was called away to the telephone.

When he returned it was clear from his manner that more than a social chat had occurred. He sat down at the table, looked thoughtfully through his brandy glass at the candle flame, and shook his head.

"Too good to last, Mr. Wilson," he said to me. "Something always comes up when I'm having a good time. That was the mayor of Starbridge on the phone. Luther Carter was killed in his Starbridge home two hours ago."

You can't have an uproar with only two people present, but that was the general effect of Senator Brand's words. Luther Carter! The name was synonymous with wealth, breeding and influence. Although Carter himself always sought and valued privacy, his death would make big waves

through the State and the country—partly because he had great wealth without public visibility. Nothing attracts the press more than money with mystery.

"The Chief of Police of Starbridge will call here at 11:30," went on Senator Brand. "I've no doubt he'll be happy to have you on the telephone with me. In fact if I read between the lines, it's you they want to talk to, not me."

I nodded absently, mentally reviewing what I knew about Luther Carter. An intellectual and a patron of the arts. Also one of the best chess players in the State. A keen musician, who had set up many musical scholarships for promising flute players—his own preferred instrument. What else? No public information on his estate, but rumors that it was up at the several hundred million dollar mark.

I turned to Senator Brand. "Do you have any idea who Luther Carter's heirs will be? I don't recall much about his family, do you?"

The Senator nodded. "He liked privacy, but I know a few things through the political grapevine. Carter married fifteen years back, got divorced after a couple of years. Apparently the marriage was a real failure and there were no children. His ex-wife was killed four or five years ago in a skiing accident. The inheritance may be complicated, because Luther Carter was also related to his wife's family. Somebody should make a study of the inbreeding of the super-rich. Putting it all together, I expect the lawyers will have a field day carving up his estate, but I doubt if anyone knows exactly who will get what."

"I'll say one thing for him," continued Senator Brand. "He didn't have a lot of the habits that many people associate with money. No

yachts, no racing cars, no harem of young women."

"But he was about the right age for a wild fling, wasn't he?" I asked. "About fifty—sorry, Senator, I wasn't implying anything."

"I'm saving my middle-age madness until I've left the Senate. You saw what happened to Wilbur Mills. Anyway," he went on, pulling in his stomach a fraction, "I'm only forty-eight. But to answer your question, I never heard any rumors of wildness. Now, come on, let's have another cigar before that phone call comes through. A dinner party is no place for news of murder."

When the call came through from Chief Police Winters, I was on a second extension. He came to the point with no preliminaries at all.

"Senator Brand? Do you have John Wilson there with you? Good. Mr. Wilson, if I come over there with a helicopter, how soon could you be on it and fly over to Starbridge?"

"If I have to be, I'm ready right now. But what's the urgency? It's getting on toward midnight."

"We are holding the people who were at the house when Luther Carter was killed. Six house guests, plus the servants and Carter's secretary. But the guests are getting itchy and we'll have lawyers showing up first thing in the morning. I'd like some help at once. We're in an unusual position—we know who did it, but we have no motive and no real evidence. If you can turn something up you'll save us an enormous hassle."

I sighed. Another late night, I could feel it in my bones. "Come on over, Senator Brand and I will be ready when you arrives."

When I replaced the receiver and went back to the dining-room I got a good old-fashioned look from Senator

Brand.

"Mr. Wilson," he said, looking at me over the top of his glasses, "when we were talking a few minutes ago about middle-aged madness, I should have mentioned that I place rushing through the middle of the night in a Police helicopter in that category. What led you to volunteer my services? As you well know, my knowledge of detective work is negligible."

"Yes, sir. But it seemed to me that those house guests may sit still for a United States Senator more than they would for me. I'd like to take advantage of that famous persuasive power—do a little pressing of the flesh on my behalf, if you will."

The Senator grunted his acceptance. Flattery never fails if it's well done. I thought about the information we had received from Police Chief Winters and felt a touch of irritation. I was raised on detective stories and the one sort that I couldn't stand was the English stately home murder mystery. Assortment of guests, bedroom hopping, and a story full of plans of the house and timetables of who was where when. I could neither read nor solve them. I had the horrible suspicion that Luther Carter's murder would fit that pattern. The arrival of Chief Winters and the helicopter put an end to that uncomfortable line of thought.

Five minutes later we were vibrating our way through the night sky. I don't like helicopters. They sway about a lot and they seem a lot less stable than ordinary aircraft. So Chief Winters had less than my full attention when he began his explanation.

"Luther Carter was having one of his musical evenings. A couple of famous musicians and a number of invited guests. After dinner they were supposed to have a violin and piano

recital. Before they could get started, someone bashed Luther Carter's head in. In the library, with a blunt instrument."

Police Chief Winters considered his words gloomily for a few seconds. He was a thin and saturnine man, not at home with murder and clearly a bit out of his depth. "Murder with a blunt instrument," he went on. "My God, it's like one of those awful old English books. House guests, musical recitals, and now murder with a blunt instrument."

If he had picked a speech to win my sympathy, he couldn't have chosen better. So far as I am concerned, the blunt instrument reached its peak about 1850, in the accomplished hands of Bill Sykes. I warmed to Chief Winters, who continued, "With a bronze statue, to be precise. Carter was killed in the library. That's next to the study and the study is next to a ground floor bedroom. The bedroom belongs to Luther Carter's secretary, Mrs. Potter. She's an invalid and she can't manage stairs.

"Now, she was in her bedroom after dinner when Carter came into the study next door with one of the guests. Mrs. Potter insists she could hear them clearly through the wall. They started talking about racial problems, then went through into the library. Mrs. Potter heard nothing more, because the study and library are separated by a solid door. Five minutes after that, Carter's body was found in the library by one of the maids.

"That wouldn't be much, except for one thing. One of Carter's house guests is Billy Willis."

Now I had the general picture all right. Billy Willis was a national figure, with strong views on civil rights, busing and integration. A lot of

people called him a racist, and he wouldn't go out of his way to deny it. Racial issues were his stock in trade and I would expect him to be in the middle of any such discussions with Luther Carter.

Chief Winters watched my reaction with gloomy satisfaction. I nodded at him. "I see where you're leading. Presumably you checked Billy Willis' alibi?"

"Yes, we checked everybody," Winters replied. "He is vague about what he was doing when Carter was killed. Mind you, most of the alibis are as bad.

"Mrs. Potter has no alibi herself, for example. But I don't think she has the strength to knock Luther Carter's brains out with a heavy statue. Let me run down the list and see what you make of them.

"First, the cook and the two maids were in the kitchen, clearing up after dinner. They all agree that none of them left until one maid went to tell Carter the concert was ready to begin, and found his body. I think the three of them are in the clear.

"That leaves six house guests. Landau and Ladvelinov were the pianist and the violinist for the concert. They were in a final rehearsal when Carter was killed and they seem to give each other alibis. The other four have poor alibis and no motives either. Billy Willis says he was listening to the rehearsal—he doesn't know about Mrs. Potter's statement, by the way, nor do any of the other guests.

"David Sullivan is a flute player, as Luther Carter was. He's been a friend of Carter and a regular visitor to the house for several years. He works at the university, about four miles north of Starbridge. He says he was up in his bedroom after dinner, cleaning his flute. No witnesses to that.

"Finally, there's a couple, Obey and Tina Russell. They've been to the house many times before, too. Obey Russell is a professional flute player who had a Luther Carter flute scholarship a few years ago. Tina is a folk singer, middling successful. Obey also says he was listening to the rehearsal, but he wasn't with Billy Willis. Tina says she had gone for a walk in the garden after dinner. Again, no witnesses for either one."

Chief Winters grimaced and closed his notebook. "That's it. Suspects? Billy Willis, David Sullivan, Obey and Tina Russell. Take your pick. Motive? Nothing. Evidence? Mrs. Potter's statement, which is very convincing."

I nodded absently. "I agree, the pianist and violinist are the only guests with good alibis. Ladvelinov I know of, I heard him in New York a couple of years ago. It must be nice to be able to afford him for an evening of private entertainment. But the other man—Landau?—I don't know. Is he a regular accompanist for Ladvelinov?"

"I don't think so. They were rehearsing hard tonight, I believe, because they had not played together before in public. Landau is late twenties, Ladvelinov late forties. Not much in common except music, I judge."

We had started to descend. Looking out of the window I saw we were about to land on the front lawn of a large private house. Fifteen bedrooms, at a guess. I looked at my watch. Twelve fifteen. Not the best hour to be starting work.

CARTER had been killed about 8:15. Dinner had not finished until 7:45. Chief Winters, worried about legal problems with the guests, wanted me

to begin at once to explore the critical half hour. First, I told him, I wanted to hear from Mrs. Potter, our one and only witness.

As soon as I saw her, I crossed Edna Potter off the suspect list. About sixty-five years old and arthritic, she stood less than five feet tall and hitting anyone with statues was beyond her powers. Despite her illness and the late hour, she had kept her spirit and was chirpy and alert.

"Now, Mr. Wilson," she began. "let's get one thing straight. There may be something wrong with my legs, but there's absolutely nothing wrong with my ears. I don't care what Chief Winters says. I heard what I heard."

I breasted the stream of words and tried to look soothing and reassuring. "Now just what did you hear, Mrs. Potter," I began, "and when did you hear it?"

"About ten after eight, Mr. Carter came in the study with Mr. Willis. They were talking about a racial problem. Mr. Willis said he was having a problem with some coloreds and Mr. Carter asked what sort of problem. Then Willis said that there was some trouble in integrating a neighborhood, and it wasn't working. So Mr. Carter told him to go into the library with him, he had a piece of paper there that would help. Mr. Carter had a high voice and Mr. Willis a low one, so I could easily tell who said what."

As Chief Winters said, it sounded convincing. "Wait just a minute, Mrs. Potter," I said. I went to the door, where Senator Brand was talking to a uniformed policeman. "Would the two of you go and chat inside the study for a minute? Keep it at normal speaking volume, if you would." I closed the bedroom door and went back to Mrs. Potter. Sure enough, the

words came through from the study, muted but quite intelligible.

Mrs. Potter looked at me with a mixture of indignation and triumph. "I believed you, Mrs. Potter," I explained, "but I have to check everything. Are you sure of the actual words they said? Things get a bit muffled coming through the wall."

"I heard what I said. I must say I was quite surprised. Mr. Carter has what you might call liberal views. If I hadn't heard it I'd not have expected him even to listen to that man Willis."

It was clear that Mrs. Potter disapproved strongly of Billy Willis. I wondered at his presence on the guest list. "Mrs. Potter," I asked, "if Mr. Carter had liberal views, why did he invite Mr. Willis tonight? After all, Billy Willis has anything but liberal views."

She looked a little embarrassed. "Well, I'm ashamed to say it, but that was my doing. I arrange the guest list and I'd got into a bit of a problem with it for last night."

"You see, when Mr. Carter found Obey Russell would be giving a recital in this area, he decided to have a dinner party for Obey. He asked me to invite Mr. Landau, the pianist, and then Mr. Landau suggested Mr. Ladvelinov, the violinist. Mr. Sullivan is a regular guest, so I added his name automatically. Naturally, Tina Russell came with her husband, and I had one other guest who cancelled out on me at the last minute. So when I was talking to Tina Russell the day before yesterday, she mentioned Billy Willis as a possible to fill the gap. He happened to be staying locally. I don't approve of his views, but I thought he might make an interesting contrast to the others, so I called and invited him. Mr. Carter always liked to have

a controversial guest—it stimulates the conversation."

That wrapped that up. After thanking Mrs. Potter I went next door to the study, where Senator Brand had been joined by Chief Winters.

"Chief," I began, "Mrs. Potter mentions a piece of paper that Luther Carter was going to get from the library. Have you done anything on that?"

"A great deal—not very productive, though. We turned the library upside down looking for it, as soon as the fingerprint boys had finished in there. My men looked inside every book for that piece of paper—thousands of them. Not a sign. I think the murderer took it away with him. Want to see the library?"

I nodded. The study itself was simply furnished but there were a number of expensive reproductions of classical Greek statues. As we went into the library I noticed several more. Chief Winters followed my look.

"Yes, it was one of those that was used," he remarked. "We put it in the front drawing-room with the body."

"No fingerprints, I suppose?"

Chief Winters looked exasperated. "Lots of them. There was such a confusion when the body was found, they broke all the rules. Moved the body, touched the murder weapon, handled everything in sight. You'd think they'd never seen a TV show in their lives. We've got fingerprints of almost everyone here. Didn't find much from Billy Willis, curiously enough."

"Can't arrest a man for that," I said. "The curious incident of the dog in the night-time isn't admissible evidence."

Winters nodded. "That's what I decided. What do you want to see in

the library here?"

I wasn't sure. We spread out to look at the shelves. There was ample evidence of Luther Carter's musical interests. Numerous books on musical history, with first editions of Burney, Adler and Chrysander. Texts on orchestration, and masses of sheet music by composers I had and hadn't heard of. It was a first-class collection, better than the average college music library. I moved on to another section. More massive texts, the collected works of Gauss, Lagrange and Cayley. Then a series of analyses of all the chess games you could hope to find—Morphy, Capablanca, Alekhine, Euwe, Tal—a gold mine for a chess enthusiast.

The next large section appeared to be biographies. In alphabetical order, I saw hundreds of texts—Bach, Euler, Leibniz, Newton, Schubert, Verdi, Wagner; the collection seemed endless. I kept moving around the shelves, past a large and beautifully bound collection of volumes on Ancient Greece.

Finally I came to the last section and paused. I turned to Chief Winters, who had been watching me hopefully as though expecting divine revelation.

"Is there another library anywhere in the house, Chief?"

He shook his head. "Not of any size, no. Luther Carter had a bookcase in his bedroom, but it was just light reading, mainly science fiction and humor."

I was balked. The thing I was looking for was missing. It seemed time to see some of the suspects, beginning with the number one choice: Billy Willis.

I recognized him easily enough when he came in. He had frequent coverage on national television. A

handsome man, with fine features and a deep soft voice, he looked far from happy. Pale, tense, and with a false air of confidence, he suggested a man about to be arrested. I began with his alibi, something that had left Chief Winters unconvinced.

"Mr. Willis, could you please tell us your movements between 7.45 and 8.15 last night."

He had a little trouble getting his voice in gear. "Well, after dinner I sat in the drawing-room, next to the music room, and smoked a couple of cigarettes. I only came out when I heard the noise and found that Mr. Carter had been found dead."

"So you heard the rehearsal, then?"

"That's right." His manner became a little easier as we talked. "I'm no expert on classical music—country and western's more my line—but I can tell top class playing when I hear it."

"And you didn't talk to anyone after dinner, before the body was discovered?"

"Not a one." The tension was back in full force. I could see why Mrs. Potter's evidence had been so well received. Billy Willis looked as guilty as you could get. After he had gone I turned to Chief Winters.

"You're sure he doesn't know about Mrs. Potter's story?"

Winters frowned. "I don't see how he could. Not a word of it was told to him. Doesn't he act guilty, though? He has a really charming manner normally—tonight, you would think we had already charged him. But looks aren't evidence, and we can't break that alibi."

"Perhaps we can confirm it then. Let's get Obey and Tina Russell in here next. Obey Russell says he heard that rehearsal too."

They made a very spectacular

couple. Six and a half feet tall, with the build of a football player, he had hands that could have made a fist around mine. It was hard to visualize those great paws drawing delicate tones from a flute. His wife's smooth cafe-au-lait complexion was a great contrast to his black, shiny face. I could see many Eastern races in her face—Asiatic cheekbones, regular white teeth and fierce dark eyes. They would turn heads wherever they went but it would be a bold man who would make a pass at her. The contrast went beyond the physical. Obey was calm and massive as an obsidian statue, Tina looked nervous and tense and regarded me like a rabbit looking at a stoat.

"With those hands, Mr. Russell, I'm surprised that you chose the flute." I began with Obey to give Tina a chance to calm down. "I would have thought you'd have found the piano or the double bass easier to handle."

Obey Russell laughed, throwing his head back and showing splendid teeth. "Mr. Wilson, where I grew up you took what you could get. I reckon a piano or double bass would have been in hock or gone for firewood inside a week. When I was given a flute I kept it with me all the time—only way I could be sure of holding on to it.

"Anyway, nowadays it's the piano as much as the flute. I give flute recitals, but if I get a real reputation it will be as a composer. I write most of Tina's stuff—high class folk, I'd call it. The flute gave me a musical education, but I know now I'll never be a Rimpal. Composition now, that's different. Maybe I'll do something good there."

Obey was fully relaxed and very sure of himself. "I gather you were listening to last night's rehearsal," I

probed. "How was it—musically speaking?"

"As I expected. Ladvelinov's a great fiddle player. I could listen to him all night, any night. Landau's not so hot. He was off in his timing once or twice and he muffed a couple of fast left-hand scales. Of course, that broken string in the middle threw them both off their stride for a while, but they soon got back in the swing of it."

"Broken string?"

"Sure. Ladvelinov broke an A-string during the rehearsal. He had to replace it and re-tune. Took just a couple of minutes."

"You mean you saw it?"

Obey laughed again. "No, man—no need to. I was in the next room, but I've got ears."

I looked at Chief Winters and said "Billy Willis?" He caught my meaning and went out of the room. I turned my attention to Tina Russell.

"And you, Mrs. Russell, I understand you didn't hear the rehearsal?"

Tina nodded and ran her tongue nervously round her upper lip. "I'm not as keen as Obey—on hearing the practice sessions—I don't get the fine points. I went for a walk outside, down by the pond at the back."

"Anybody see you there?"

"Again, signs of nervousness. I doubt it. The others were in the house. I came back in expecting to hear the concert, about eight-fifteen."

"And which of the other guests did you know before tonight?" I asked.

"Well, I met David Sullivan several times here. I've seen Ladvelinov a couple of times when he and Obey were on the same program. And Billy Willis is a sort of fan of mine. He has been to a number of my shows and come backstage, but he and Obey don't get on too well."

"Damn right," Obey spoke up. "He

thinks I'm an uppity nigger. He daren't say it or I'd knock his head off. But he suggests it in his tone of voice. He made his name running on race prejudice and he can't hide it."

I began to think we were looking into the wrong murder. If Luther Carter had not been killed, perhaps Billy Willis would have been. Obey could knock his head off, just about literally.

I turned again to Obey. "Did you play the flute before dinner last night with Luther Carter?"

Obey nodded. "Not play; practice. I was showing Luther and David Sullivan how I handle some tricky passages for the flute. Turns out that part of the reason for my techniques is the size of my hands—I can easily span a twelfth on the piano and the other two have trouble with a tenth."

As Obey was speaking Chief Winters had slipped back into the room. I looked at him enquiringly. He shook his head. "Willis says he didn't notice any string break during the rehearsal. Nothing unusual, he said."

When Obey and Tina Russell had left, Chief Winters looked at me again and shook his head. "I know what you're going to suggest. Obey has a deep voice and he's interested in racial problems. We thought about that and it just won't work. We took Obey through that rehearsal, note by note almost. He had to have heard it all. Every comment he had about repeats, pitch and intonation is backed up exactly by Ladvelinov and Landau. Obey's big but he can't be in two places at once. And the rehearsal ran right through the time of the murder."

That disposed of one of my ideas. Obey had the voice and the racial interest, but Tina had the guilty look. Suppose Obey did the killing and

Tina heard the rehearsal and told him later? Ideas like that meant the lateness of the hour was getting to me.

While Chief Winters was getting David Sullivan for interview, I had one more thought: we had too many people acting guilty. Could there be collusion, like *Murder in the Calais Coach*? David Sullivan's arrival added fuel to that wild spark of an idea. He looked nervous, tired—and guilty.

Fair-haired and handsome, at first glance David Sullivan was in his early twenties. At second glance, add ten years. Eyes a little bloodshot at the moment from lack of sleep, and a reluctance to meet my look.

"This won't take long, Mr. Sullivan. We just want to confirm a few things with you. You teach music at the local university, I understand?"

He looked startled. "Why, no. I teach, but not music." He smiled a little. "I'm not good enough for that. Like Luther Carter, I'm strictly an amateur."

A surprise there. "Then what is your subject?" I asked.

"I'm a mathematician. I teach and do research in mathematics," he went on, "and play the flute as a hobby. It's not a question of money—I have plenty of that and I don't need to teach. It's talent—I don't have what it takes to be a professional flute player, much as I enjoy it."

"And Obey Russell does have what it takes?"

Sullivan nodded vigorously. "In large amounts. It's not a question of technique. I have as much technique as Obey. It's in the ear and the musical imagination. No, my future is in mathematics, not music. But Obey can be great. Given his talent and his dedication, he can go anywhere. Not in flute-playing, I think—he's chafing against the limits of that already. He's

really a composer."

We had found an Obey Russell fan—enough to make him lose his beaten look for a moment and find some real enthusiasm. An idea was stirring in the back of my brain, but I pressed on with the questioning.

"Since you were a regular visitor here, perhaps you can tell us something about Mr. Carter. For instance, what were his views on racial questions?"

Sullivan looked genuinely puzzled. "I don't think he had many views. It wasn't a subject I've heard him say much about. I'd say he was fairly liberal, but certainly not active."

"One more thing then. Where were you at the time of Mr. Carter's death?"

"In my room. We played a bit before dinner, Luther Carter, Obey Russell and I. So I had to clean my flute and pack it away."

When he had gone, Chief Winters looked up from his notes and shook his head in disgust. "There we are again. No alibi worth a penny, and looking guilty as hell. But no motive—and he was surprised by your question on racial issues, not worried by it. Let's get the other two musicians in here, then that's all the interviews finished."

I wanted to make a telephone call, but it could wait until our last two suspects had been seen. Anyway, I very much wanted to see Landau and Ladvelinov and confirm a growing suspicion.

The two made a good contrast in types. Ladvelinov short and swarthy, Landau much younger, thin and elegant with classical Greek features and soulful eyes and mouth. Yet according to Obey Russell, it was Ladvelinov who had the beauty in his soul and showed it through his playing. From

appearances, Landau should have been the poet, and Ladvelinov running a delicatessen in Brooklyn.

"We are checking the statements from other guests," I began, "and would like you to confirm some things. Was Obey Russell present during your rehearsal last night?"

Ladvelinov acted as spokesman. "Not in the room, no, but he might as well have been. We saw his statement later. He caught every error in phrasing, timing and intonation and remembered them better than we did. A remarkable ear."

"You seem to know him well."

He chuckled and nodded. "Obey? Very well—better than he knows himself." He noted my inquiring look and went on: "Obey lives for music. Nothing else matters much. For me, a single man, that is all right. But not for a married man. I saw Tina last night and there is trouble. And I know why."

"Tina has a little talent, and she is a beautiful girl. But she's not the right vehicle for Obey's material. She doesn't know what he is trying to say. I tell you, I could show the beauty of it, because I understand it. Tina has not grown and Obey has. That will cause trouble—maybe not today, but tomorrow."

Chief Winters looked across at me: From his expression, he didn't think too much of that speech as useful evidence. I steered us back to the main subject. "Did you know Luther Carter well?"

"Well? No. We had met maybe ten times at concerts. Peter here," he indicated Landau with a chop of his hand, "he is the one who really knew him."

"I suppose that's right." Landau picked up his cue smoothly. "We met about four months ago at a charity

concert and I have got to know him well since then. His death is a tragedy, as a man, as a musician and as a supporter of music."

Landau spoke with real fervor and intensity. I hope someone will speak of me at my death with equal admiration. I had one last question.

"Mr. Ladvelinov, did you break a string at the rehearsal last night?"

He seemed surprised at the question. "Yes, I broke an A-string. But it was no problem, I carry spares in my case."

As soon as they had left, I placed my phone call to New York. We got through at once and I had a five minute conversation—the first two of them apologizing for calling at three in the morning.

After we hung up, I explained the situation to Chief Winters. He went out at once and returned with David Sullivan. Winters then left and I began without preamble.

"Mr. Sullivan, in a few minutes you will be formally charged with the murder of Luther Carter. If you cooperate with the police, public information will be confined to the murder itself. If the police are forced to prove their case without your cooperation, all the relevant facts, including the motive, are going to come out. Would you care to make a statement?"

He had listened with head bowed and hands tightly clenched. When I finished, he looked up. The tension had gone and he looked calm and relaxed.

"Thank you, Mr. Wilson," he said with a sigh. "I had almost decided to do what you suggest anyway. If you will get Chief Winters, I will give him a full statement. I hope that the—other factors—can remain private."

SENATOR BRAND and I were in the study. It was almost five o'clock in the morning and I was all-in. More than tired, drained. The late hour, the intense mental activity and the flood of sympathetic emotional reactions combined to wring me dry. I sat there mindlessly, waiting for the fatigue to wash away.

Finally Senator Brand broke the silence. "I hate to play Dr. Watson, but come on, Sherlock, tell me what all this is about. We come here to get the evidence to arrest one man, and another one confesses. What have you been up to?"

I roused myself with an effort. "Sorry, Senator. I'm not holding out on you, just tired." I rubbed my eyes. "I suppose it's best to clear up the minor mystery first. Too many suspects. Billy Willis, Tina Russell and David Sullivan all had no alibis.

"Willis said he heard the rehearsal, but he didn't know they stopped to replace a broken string. Why did he lie to the police? Well, it was simple and not too inspiring.

"I found early in my interviews that Tina Russell had suggested Billy Willis be included as a dinner guest in the first place. No one else really knew Willis—except for Obey Russell, and he hated him.

"Then, Tina sang music that Willis liked. He was a fan of hers. And Ladvelinov pointed out to me that Tina was having trouble in her marriage. Obey was leaving her behind, intellectually, and she was in need of some kind of morale booster. Billy Willis, who can be very charming and attractive when he tries, caught Tina at just the right time.

"After dinner last night, Tina was in the garden as she said. But Billy Willis was with her. It takes no great imagination to guess what they were

doing there."

Senator Brand looked incredulous. "You're suggesting they would risk suspicion of murder to keep their actions secret?"

"They would. Remember who we are dealing with. Billy Willis is the man who preaches racial purity and to his followers Tina Russell is black. If news of the affair got out, he'd be a doomed man politically.

As for Tina Russell, Billy Willis is the kind of man Obey hates. What do you think would happen if he found out his wife was having an affair with Willis?"

"There'd be hell to pay," replied the Senator. "Obey's a monster, he could tear Willis apart with his bare hands if he felt like it."

I nodded and went on. "So once Tina and Billy Willis are out of the way as suspects, the obvious one left is David Sullivan. But what can his motive be?"

"I looked again at the background facts on Luther Carter. His marriage had been a flop, almost no marriage at all. There were no wild flings—which meant no young girls around him. But what about young *men*? Luther Carter was of a generation and a disposition that would conduct any affair like that with great discretion."

Senator Brand gaped at me. "So you're suggesting that the murder was really a crime of passion?"

"It seemed more and more likely," I replied, "as we heard the witnesses. David Sullivan is a handsome and sensitive young man, with the artistic temperament that would have attracted Luther Carter. He is cultured and affluent, and a frequent guest here. It takes no great imagination to see him as Luther Carter's friend in the sense of Ancient Greece. Remember the Greek statues and the

books on old Greece in the Library. That period regarded love between men as the highest form, purer and nobler than love for women. I suspected that Luther Carter held the same view.

"Now, what could the motive have been? I noticed one thing that several people told us last night. Ladvelinov was the maestro, the top attraction. But Mrs. Potter told us that Luther Carter asked for *Landau*, not Ladvelinov. Yet according to Obey Russell, who knows his stuff, Landau just isn't very good. In a professional musician, I would expect Luther Carter to insist on the best—especially with Obey in the audience.

"So why Landau? I had my suspicions when I heard that he had known Luther Carter for just a few months. Seeing him strengthened the idea. Putting it crudely, David Sullivan was being jilted by Luther Carter in favor of Peter Landau. Carter told Sullivan that in the library last night. He lost control then and hit Carter with the first thing that came to hand. Sullivan ran away without trying to hide the evidence—but the rest of them did that, trampling around the library and messing up everything in sight before the police arrived."

Senator Brand shook his head in bewilderment. "I'm still lost. I can accept everything you've said—but what about Mrs. Potter's statement? That doesn't fit in anywhere."

"You're right, it doesn't. It confused everything. Remember when we first went into the library and looked around the shelves? I expected to see at least some sign of interest in social problems. There wasn't one book on such things—and it turned out that Luther Carter had no interest in the subject.

"What I did notice was a lot of

books on mathematics. Gauss, Newton, Lagrange, Euler—they were mathematicians, and their works were in Luther Carter's library. I thought he was probably a mathematician, as well as a chess player and a musician—those talents often occur together."

"But wouldn't somebody have told us about it if he were a mathematician?" asked Senator Brand.

"I don't think so. You see, mathematics is a curiously private affair. No recitals, no competitions, no publicity—not even a Nobel Prize in it, as a friend of mine who teaches math in New York once complained to me. Luther Carter could have done a great deal of mathematics and few people would ever have known.

"When I heard that David Sullivan was a mathematician, something clicked. I had an idea, but I needed some specialist help to confirm it. I called my mathematical friend who teaches in New York—maybe I should say ex-friend, we called at three o'clock—and that put it all together.

"It turns out Mrs. Potter is the villain of the piece, quite by accident. She heard a conversation, but she misunderstood it. As you know, when two or three people see an accident they often give quite different descriptions of what happened. They aren't lying, but their interpretation depends on their background. Mrs. Potter heard the key words and applied them in the only way that made sense to her. And because of her interpretation, she was convinced that it was Billy Willis speaking, because Billy is associated in her mind with racial questions.

"When I heard that Sullivan was a mathematician and had reason to think Luther Carter was one also, I wondered if they could possibly have been discussing mathematics. I knew

from college days that 'integration' describes a mathematical process. What about the other words Mrs. Potter had heard?

"That's when I called my friend. Neighborhood? Yes, he said, it's a special but very common math term to describe a small region about a point. Problem with coloreds? Not quite that, he said. It's the 'four-color problem', and it's one of the really famous problems in math, about the number of different colors needed to color a map so that adjacent regions are all different.

"That was it, sir. Luther Carter and David Sullivan were talking about a math research problem. They went to the library to look at a mathematical paper—not a 'piece of paper', which is the way Mrs. Potter interpreted it. Instead, Luther Carter chose that quiet moment to tell Sullivan that it was over between them. Then it was all over for Luther Carter."

We got to our feet and made our way to the front of the house, past the original paintings, valuable porcelain and fine Georgian silver. At the front door we stood for a moment. Senator Brand had the last word.

"Like Humpty-Dumpty."

"What?" I thought I had misheard him.

"Humpty-Dumpty. You remember, in *Alice Through the Looking-glass*, he said words mean what we choose them to mean. That's what happened to Mrs. Potter, and caused all the confusion over Luther Carter's murder."

I nodded agreement and on impulse looked up into the dawn sky. A waning moon, but no comets or meteor showers. Senator Brand and I walked across the broad lawn and through the rustling October leaves to the police helicopter.

CATALYST

CHARLES DE VET

He'd been on ice for over a hundred years, but his powers were undiminished . . .

Illustrated by Tony Gleeson

HE WAS NOT a timid man.

He walked into my office, just a shade above a tramp in appearance, and announced, "I am Magnus Westman." As though certain I would recognize the name—and jump to attention.

My first reaction was amusement at the pretense of this shoddy fellow—followed almost immediately by an abrupt realization that he was not a man to be regarded lightly.

I had been expecting him—and my orders had been to "play it straight." "My name is Dan Dullum, Mr. Westman," I said blandly. "What can I do for you?"

He ignored me, standing with his feet spread, scowling and introspective—while I studied him, quickly but attentively, noting the thick neck and shoulders of a wrestler, and a body large boned and muscular, yet which he carried with poise and assurance. I judged him to be in his early forties—barely a fourth this age's normal life span.

The whole set of his features was harsh. His flesh was soft and pallid, with a several days growth of black barbs darkening his chin and lower cheeks. His eyes were underscored

with half-moons of jaundiced yellow, and he needed a haircut. He might have been recovering from a two week drunk.

"I woke up this morning down by the ore docks," he said then. "How the hell I got there I don't know." He added, "I'm from Earth."

His accent was right. As second assistant attache in Earth's embassy that made him technically my responsibility. I pulled a printed form from an upper drawer. "Won't you sit down," I invited.

He eased himself into a chair to the left of my desk, shifting it to face me directly, but saying nothing more.

"Do you have any idea how you got here on Madar?" I prompted.

"None."

I picked up a rollet. "Your name is Magnus Westman, you said?"

"You don't recognize it?"

"Should I?" I countered, though I remained courteous.

He grunted irritably. "Let it go."

"I presume you'll want to contact relatives on Earth, or send a request for funds?" I suggested tentatively.

The question seemed to spark a new thought. He reached into a rear pocket and pulled out a black billfold.

"At least I've still got that," he said. He opened it and thumbed through several green bills. "Three hundred six Earth dollars," he stated. "They're exchangeable?" he asked.

"One for one," I answered.

Another minute went by while he sat with his forehead wrinkled in a frown of concentration. "I suppose I will have to let you send a cable," he decided finally. "Address it to Magnus N. Westman Enterprises, St. Paul, Minnesota." He paused again. "They'll probably want some proof of identity. What would you suggest?"

Magnus N. Westman Enterprises was one of Earth's tycoon corporations. "We already have your encephalograph." I indicated an opaque plate set in the wall beside me with a turn of my head. "Standard procedure with visitors, you understand—it will serve very well as identification." I avoided his incipient glower by switching open the intercom on my desk and speaking into it. "Will you step into my office, please, Miss Potvin?"

My secretary, Genevieve Potvin, came in a moment later and stood by the side of my desk. "You may dictate anything you like," I said to Westman. "Keep it brief, please."

He did not answer. I saw then that he was looking at Genevieve, his eyes widened with arrested attention.

I shifted my gaze to her. She was very much aware of my visitor's regard, apparently caught up in something about him that I had missed. She was standing with the feminine self-consciousness of a woman strongly attracted to a man.

In surprise I glanced back at him. To me his charm was not apparent, but the man evidently possessed that intangible quality women find irresistible. It must have been able to come



through strongly, even in his present shabby condition, to be affecting my secretary as it was.

Genevieve was an exceptionally beautiful woman, full bodied and lithe, a brunette, with brown eyes that seemed to smile even in repose—and I was conscious of an acute dismay. I had not told her, but I had been in love with Genevieve for some time. I coughed dryly. "Mr. Westman would like to send an interworld wire," I said. "Will you take his dictation, please?"

Genevieve started slightly and a faint tinge of red colored her cheeks. She flicked on the transcriber attached to her belt, and stood with studied disinterest.

Westman dictated a short request for funds to a Pat Kelly, evidently general manager in the firm of Westman Enterprises. Genevieve left when he'd finished without another glance in his direction.

There was a short awkward interval after she'd gone. Awkward for me that is—Westman was not a person easily disconcerted. He sat quietly, with his gaze idly surveying the room.

A clock calendar on the wall caught his attention. "Sethmoon 9, 532," he read aloud. His gaze returned to me. "What year would that be on Earth?" he asked.

I figured quickly. "4354," I said.

For the first time since entering my office Westman lost his hard composure. But even then only to the extent of a quick change of expression and a straightening of his back. "You're certain of that?" he asked.

"Positive," I answered.

He rose. His complexion seemed to have grown a shade whiter, and his features more haggard. He opened his mouth to say something, changed his mind, and wandered from the room.

I let his cable go through. I was still playing it as I had been ordered.

I printed MAGNUS N. WESTMAN on a sheet of paper then, put it through the scrambler, and sent it out. I should receive a reply very soon.

MY WORK with the embassy was a subterfuge—my real job was with a quite different organization.

Space exploration through the past twenty centuries had expanded rapidly, and Earth colonies—and colonies of colonies—now numbered well over the Ten Thousand Worlds cognomen. With such a vast number of Worlds, subject to little more than complimentary supervision by Earth, troubles arose as regularly and inevitably as birth and death. During the first thousand years jealousies, jockeying for trade advantages, and greed for power often brought war to the Worlds. And Earth was without the strength, or sufficient prestige, to prevent them.

During the early part of the second millinium a Federation Council was set up to investigate and mediate disputes. A noble concept, but as might have been expected, narrow self interest kept the Worlds from investing the Council with any real power, and it was helpless to enforce its decisions. It quickly devolved into a querulous record keeper, with its suggestions and orders largely ignored.

Yet unbelievably the wars between the Worlds lessened.

Learned papers had been written on how the near powerless organization achieved its results. Some regarded it as a random occurrence, a mood of good will coinciding with the establishment of the Council. Others argued that the Council served as a symbol, inducing a more cooperative

attitude among its members by its mere existence.

Still other, more cynical observers, attributed the success of the Council to covert activities, many of them probably illegal. The latter, of course, were entirely correct.

The fact that I had been alerted to watch for Westman made him something more than an insignificant factor in the Council's surreptitious considerations.

I HAD JUST FINISHED a cup of coffee when the vision-master across the room lit up and the figure of Ben Frank appeared. The head of our organization. This prompt reply meant that he had to be here on Madar.

I experienced a moment of awe at this face to face meeting with Frank—his three dimensional image was barely distinguishable from actuality—and I waited with uneasy respect for him to speak.

Frank was old, perhaps approaching two hundred years, and his age showed—but only physically. Mentally he was the sharpest man I'd ever known.

A small hint of that intelligence revealed itself when he spoke. "We meet again, young Dan. For only the third time in your nine years with us." Retaining details such as that, in an organization numbering in the thousands, took genius of the highest order.

Frank's face had long since lost the power of muscular expression, yet he gave the distinct impression of being pleased with me. He augmented that by interrupting my fumbling search for a reply. "I've always been fond of you, Dan," he said, apparently irrelevantly. "And others of our mutual acquaintance express the same sentiment. I suppose we'd have to rate

that attractiveness your primary asset."

"Thank you, sir," I mumbled.

"There's no necessity for thanks. I merely state a fact." He nodded slightly, and I realized how really old the great man was. Even this interview was a strain on the aged body, with his magnificent brain carrying all the burden.

His eyes, that had seemed about to close, opened wider. "And that is your assignment then," he said. "In addition to observing Westman's activities, I'd like you to make him your friend." He rested his thumb and forefinger on the bridge of his nose. "I'm certain that will present you with little difficulty."

I realized only when the screen went blank that the interview was over.

WESTMAN ENTERPRISES answered my cable that afternoon—with much the information I had expected: *Founder of corporation Magnus N. Westman disappeared one hundred forty three years ago stop man obviously imposter stop suggest you ascertain how he acquired encephalograph and prosecute if you find sufficient cause stop Lester Quick general manager.*

IT WAS EXACTLY one week later that Westman paid me a second visit.

He had cleaned himself up considerably, was neatly shaved, and wore a new suit, inexpensive but in good taste. Even his personality seemed different. The abrupt, almost hostile manner of his first visit was gone, replaced by an affability to which I quickly found myself responding.

"I must have sounded like a fool the other day," he introduced, as I took his proffered hand.

I shrugged noncommittally.

"I was confused," he resumed. "That's why I left without waiting for an answer to my wire. You did send it, I presume?"

"Yes."

"And they answered that I was an imposter. That Magnus Westman had disappeared some hundred forty years ago. Right?"

I nodded.

"And, of course, the general manager's name wasn't Pat Kelly?"

"Still right," I said. "The cable was signed by a Lester Quick."

He changed topics. "Have you eaten yet? I'll buy."

I made a pretense of hesitation, not wanting to appear too eager.

"Wouldn't you like to hear the story—whether or not you believe it?" he tempted.

"I would," I acquiesced, more than officially curious. And, without quite expecting it, I found myself liking the man.

THE RESTAURANT was crowded, but Westman raised one hand, casually but imperiously, and a moment later a waiter stood by our side. That might prove his rarest talent.

"I've figured it out," he began, after the waiter had escorted us to a table and taken our orders.

At my display of interest he stated enigmatically. "The suspension vaults."

I knew what he meant—and he was correct.

The life-suspension vaults had been perfected more than five hundred years before—and hailed as an epic development. Yet now they were nearly deserted. Costs—for care and maintenance—were immense, and the results seldom ever satisfactory. Those seeking new medical methods were often cured of their ills on awakening,

but the cultural gap they experienced was devastating—as it was to the others seeking a new life.

My attention returned to Westman. "Do you mean that's where you've been the past hundred years?" I asked.

"It has to be the answer."

"Who would put you there?" I hoped to learn just how much he knew.

"Does it matter now?" He seemed to have grown bored with the subject.

"What are you going to do about it?" I asked.

"Nothing."

"You should have a fortune waiting back on Earth," I pressed.

"I know Earth law," he answered. "The statute of limitations will have run out on my claim to it by this time."

"I think there's more to this than you're telling me," I tried, fishing for any information the Council might be able to use.

"All right," he surrendered good-naturedly. "Some of the activities I promoted through Westman Enterprises might be considered outside the law. I'd hate to have to defend myself in court."

For no reason I could name I found myself returning his broad smile.

WHILE WE ATE Westman kept up an intermittent conversation. I don't remember ever enjoying a meal, or a man's company, quite so much.

In my job I have had occasion to listen to superb raconteurs many times before, but too often I was aware that the verbal dexterity I observed was their principal endowment. In time their clever wit and repartee faded in my sight to mere glibness. With Westman, however, his brilliant essays seemed only out-

ward evidence of the cerebation and strength beneath the surface. It was like watching a volcano, seeing only the bursts of flame erupting through the cracks in the mountain wall, that revealed the dynamic energy within.

Sometimes his personal philosophy left me uneasy, but never bored.

"What do you intend to do now?" I asked, near the end of our meal.

"Start all over again—right here on Madar," he answered without hesitation.

My askance must have showed on my face.

"Am I a fool then?" He finished a last sip of an excellent wild grape wine, savoring it on his tongue and palate before swallowing. "I may not be normal," he said, "but I'll grant you nothing more. This is a challenge, a World of unexplored potentiality and opportunity, a place to test my strength, to pit my brains and skills and guts against other men. What more could anyone ask?"

He made a motion to rise, and our waiter hurried over to pull back his chair. "How much money do you have?" he asked me.

"I'll pay," I said magnanimously.

He smiled, as though at a weak joke. "How much do you have in your bank account?" he asked.

I meant to put him precisely and explicitly in his place, but instead found myself muttering, "About eight thousand dollars."

He was plainly disappointed. "Well, we'll have to make it do," he said. "You're willing to invest it, I presume?"

"I don't know," I found the courage to hedge. "Just what do you have in—"

"I'm offering you an investment in Magnus N. Westman," he stated. "For your eight thousand I'll give you

a one percent interest in my future earnings—in perpetuum. You'll never have such an opportunity again."

I made an attempt to protest, but he brushed my objections aside with an irritated gesture of one hand. "Call your lawyer. Have him meet us in your office." I had a sense of being swept along by an irresistible force.

SEVERAL WEEKS passed before I saw Westman again, weeks in which I had little time to give more than passing thought to his activities. Madar had recently become the focal point of potential trouble, and the Council was active.

It had all started when Tintine, a World on the fringe of a nearby stargroup, discovered and set up mining operations on a small metal-heavy planet on the outer rim of our nebula. The planet was not suitable for human colonization, but its metals made it a rich prize. By interWorld law, being first to establish a base gave Tintine exclusive territorial rights.

The Jorgenson clan—power core of Madar's oligarchic government—quickly located a mining depot on the reverse side of the planet from Tintine's settlement, and with forged records and loud blusterings claimed prior jurisdiction.

From there the affair followed the normal devious course of claim and counterclaim, threat and counter-threat, shifts of alliance, and maneuverings for advantage.

Tintine was an independent World, but united in a mutual aid pact with a nearby stargroup more powerful than Madar and her group. However, Tintine's allies feared to move against Madar because a third stargroup had designs on her trading routes. Therefore stargroup two bargained with a stargroup four to harass stargroup

three . . .

Ad finitum.

In time the trouble might easily flare into a war—unless Madar's government could be convinced to withdraw its claim, and perhaps the time had already passed when that would prevent the trouble. At present Madar was bitterly quarrelling with the Council for, they claimed, giving credence to biased reports of the situation.

The Council's covert branch was very busy, which meant that I was very busy.

MEANWHILE, Westman had bought a copter and established a fish delivery service from the west coast to several small inland towns. He was moving in a small way, but in big company. Fishing, and associated activities, was one of Madar's leading industries:

The Allied Fisheries combine controlled most of the world's catch. Westman was able to buck them to this limited degree by being less cumbersome, and able to deliver his product several hours earlier each day. He kept his price and expenses down by not requiring refrigeration.

I shook my head when I heard the news. Allied Fisheries would never permit him to continue. As much because of bad precedent as the lost business.

The engagement between the upstart and the titan was not long in coming.

During the following two months I watched the battle unfold. Allied Fisheries lowered the price of their product in Westman's territory to the minimum allowed by the World's anti-trust laws. Westman matched the price, and still held his time advantage.

Next step, Allied tied the local fish-

ing fleets into a contract of exclusive purchase. Westman bought an option on three boats owned by a big fisherman named Indian Joe McClusky. The three vessels would be able to supply his needs. And for a time there the atagonists paused; tensed, each waiting for the other to show weakness.

Westman dropped into my office a few days later.

THE MAN had grown visibly tougher. His skin had acquired a healthy tan and he had lost some weight, the hand with which he shook mine was calloused and rough. I'd heard that he had been working a sixteen hour day, seven days a week, sparing neither himself nor the eight men working for him. He paid double average wages, and when a man faltered there were others waiting to take his place.

This time when we ate he allowed me to pay.

Westman did not wait until the meal was finished before getting down to business. "I need more money, Dan," he said.

"Where do you think I'm going to get it?" I asked indignantly. "I have only a couple hundred in the bank, and exactly twenty two dollars in my pocket. You already took the rest."

"You have a government credit bureau," he said. "You can borrow six thousand on your signature. It won't be as much as I need, but it will help."

He had his facts straight, as usual—but I couldn't let him get away with this a second time. "Just what makes you think I'm going into debt to pull you out of a hole?" I asked, putting what sarcasm I could into my voice.

He looked at his watch. "Hurry and

finish your lunch," he said. "We'll still have time to get the money today."

I was doing this for the Council, I told myself as I capitulated.

THAT EVENING I saw Westman enter one of the more elite drinking places. The woman on his arm was Genevieve Pötvin.

The next morning when she came to work I asked, "How much did he get from you?"

Her eyes widened, but hers was too much a sweet and cool nature to be easily angered. "He said he needed fourteen thousand dollars," she answered.

"How much did you have in the bank?"

"Fourteen thousand, two hundred." She was still puzzled.

"And you gave it to him?"

She nodded.

I sat helplessly silent.

FOUR DAYS LATER the battle between Westman and Allied Fisheries entered the bare knuckle stage. I read the first item in the local news sheets. Westman's copter had been wrecked in the mountains. Sabotage was suspected—though Westman had entered no complaint. I breathed a sigh when I read the account. That would finish him. It was almost a relief to have the affair terminated.

I was a bit premature. The next day there was an account of the wreck of an entire train of the Allied Fisheries line. The two drivers and two helpers had all been killed, and damages ran into the three hundred thousand dollar figure. Even I had underestimated his ruthlessness.

I decided to pay him a visit.

I FOUND Westman in a small room

in the rear of one of his fishing sheds; seated at a decrepit desk, writing in a red ledger. The place was dirty and ill cared for, and heavy with the stink of fish that came through the thin partition from the main shed.

Westman looked up as I entered. He needed a shave again, and his eyes were shot with streaks of red. The heat in the shed had brought out a thin glistening film of sweat on his face and bare shoulders. He looked mean and hard.

An unlit cigar, half burned, was gripped in one corner of his mouth. I noted a whiskey bottle and a glass on the desk in front of him. The neck wrapping was still beside the bottle, indicating that it had been opened recently. It was less than half full. "Sit down," he directed.

"You pulled a stupid trick," I said, as I obeyed.

"That's none of your damn business." He softened the words by pulling his lips back from square teeth, but there was no lessening of the high pitched dominance of his nature.

"Are you going to deny wrecking that train, and killing those men?" I asked.

"Deny it, hell. I'm proud of it."

"You'll never get away with it," I returned.

"I won't eh?" his voice pushed at me. With a steady hand he poured a half glass of whiskey, and drank it neat. He offered me none. He must have had enough liquor to paralyze an average man, yet he showed no sign of it. "This is no Sunday School game I'm playing," he said. "They hit me—I hit back. You can't hurt by hitting easy."

He examined his dead cigar, and dropped it on the floor. "Up until yesterday I was just a nuisance to them," he said. "A gnat pestering an

elephant. I think they're seeing me as something a little bigger and tougher right now."

"They're too big for you," I pointed out.

"Of course they are," he growled. "In fact, they already got me licked. Where the hell am I going to get the money to replace my copter, or to get men to work for me now? My option with Indian Joe is up next week. Where do I get the money to buy his boats?"

"Then it's over?" I was careful to keep my voice from revealing the relief I felt.

"I hope not." His manner was almost tranquil. "I'm playing with a dead hand," he said, "but Brown doesn't know that."

C. J. Brown, I recalled, was the head of Allied Fisheries. "He will, before very long," I reminded him.

Westman nodded. "Right, but before then I hope to run a bluff. He's looking at me now with respect, perhaps even with a little fear. I telegraphed him yesterday and told him the train wreck was only the beginning."

"Did he answer?" I was caught up again in the naked strength this man always revealed in any contact with him.

He allowed himself a small grimace of satisfaction. "He did. He called and asked me to stop in at his office tomorrow afternoon."

This far at least the bluff had worked. I rose to leave.

"Just a minute," Westman stopped me. "I want you to do one more thing for me. Stop at a WU station and send a cable to a bank on Earth. You think of a name for the bank. Request a loan of twenty thousand dollars on your home there."

I had passed the stage where I

tried to remonstrate with him. "I don't own any property on Earth—as you probably already know," I said.

He hunched his shoulders and let them drop again. "It makes no difference—it's just part of the bluff. Brown will have had me watched lately. He'll learn that you were here, and that you sent the cable—and what was in it. I'll need everything I can get to keep him from seeing just how dead my hand is."

I left his office, stopping at a WU station on my way home. I appeased my conscience for still cooperating with Westman by sending a full report to the Council, giving all the facts I had on him. I suggested steps be taken before he tried any further violence.

The evening had not yet passed before I received a reply: *Continue close surveillance. Otherwise—HANDS OFF!*

I WAS FORTUNATE in one respect: I had a good lead into Brown's organization. On Madar big business is inextricably bound into government, and it's usually simpler to buy information there than in the government branches. In this instance we had even been able to tap Brown's personal office. A strip of metallic paint, matching exactly the flooring and furniture it traversed; led from a transmitter concealed in his desk intercom, to our bought clerk in an outer office. The transcript tape I received the next evening gave me a play of every word and sound during Westman's interview. I had visited the office once myself, and I could visualize both men as I sat listening to the playback.

"Sit down, please." The voice was Brown's. He prided himself on being a gentleman, a polished man of the

world. That his ethics were notably untidy deterred him not at all in his act.

Westman did not answer, but by the slight sound of a scraping chair I knew he had complied.

"We seem to be having a little misunderstanding," Brown began with pointed understatement.

Nothing from Westman.

"We can't permit this to continue, you know," Brown let a brittle edge creep into his voice.

"No, I don't suppose even Allied Fisheries can afford many more losses like that." Again Westman was making no pretense of innocence.

"We have enough evidence to send you to jail for a good long time," Brown said.

"Why don't you, then?"

Brown cleared his throat. "I try to be a fair man, Mr. Westman. I realize you may have felt you had grounds for bitterness toward us. I have decided not to press charges. On the condition that I receive a signed statement of your guilt, and your word that you will leave Madar within twenty eight hours. I may even be willing to advance you a moderate sum, if you should need it."

Westman laughed.

I could imagine Brown's pink face, with its flush of blood just beneath the surface, growing redder. It always did when he was angry—or when his bluff was called. "I'll see that you get at least twenty years, you pig-headed thug!" he barked.

"Let's stop this kid's game and get down to business," Westman told him.

"Right." Brown was coldly logical. "The evidence we have may not be good enough to convict you. I'll admit that. But do you imagine it will stop an organization with our resources? If

we can't whip you in court, we'll find other ways. You'll never do any more business on Madar—you'll never be able to get a decent job. We'll hound you off this world." He let his voice sink into a low tone of menace, and played typical Brown melodrama. "If that isn't enough, your name will find its way into the obituary columns." Here he probably smiled condescendingly. "I, too, dislike kid games, Mr. Westman."

Westman's voice was dead and flat as he answered. "If you're declaring war on me," he said, "you had better know I can never do anything by halves. One of us will be dead the next time we meet. Are you willing to bet it won't be you?"

At this point I could imagine Brown's flush fading, as the first sense of danger—real, personal danger—struck home. The man had little physical courage. He, too, would be seeing the hard diamond core of the man before him, and not being reassured by what he saw.

The silence grew thin, and held. When it ended I was surprised that it was Westman who spoke. "There's a better way to handle this," he said.

"Yes?" Brown inquired. His voice had lost much of its timbre. He coughed, and tried to regain his lost composure. "Just what do you have in mind?"

"Why don't you ask what my price is?"

Brown must have been caught completely off guard. I heard him breath deeply twice, before he answered. "All right, Mr. Westman. Just what is your price?" He managed to put cold hateur into his voice.

"A job with Allied Fisheries. As your personal assistant."

"Do you imagine that I would hire you?" Brown asked incredulously.

"Would that be so absurd?" Westman countered. "It would be a smart way to avoid the trouble you're sure to get otherwise. And I think you'd find I earn my keep. I know my way around, I'm dependable, and I have a strong stomach. There must be many times when you could use a man like that."

"What salary would you expect?" I could tell that Brown had already made his decision. He was saving face now by pretending to dictate terms.

I visualized Westman making his gesture of impatience. "I'll let you decide that. Pay me what I'm worth."

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Westman." Brown's serenity had returned. I thought I detected a hint of relief also. "I might just possibly accept your proposition. Give me a few days to think on it. I'll let you know one way or another by the end of the week."

"Good enough." Westman's chair scraped again as he rose.

I had just heard a master bluffer turn a dead hand into a winner.

THE FOLLOWING weekend Genevieve spent with Westman. When she returned, with her body singing and so much alive, as though she moved in a delightful world, I knew she was lost to me forever. Unless, I amended wryly, Westman tired of her.

I didn't see much of him after he joined Allied Fisheries, though I did keep as close a check on him as possible. His first visible activity in his new job had to do with Indian Joe McClusky.

He had tried to take over the fishing route Westman had abandoned. Westman delivered his rebuke in person. His beating of the big fisherman put McClusky in a hospital for six

weeks. He still carried his broken arm in a sling when he came out.

Through the next year and a half the pattern repeated itself many times. Westman was Brown's man-of-dirty-jobs—and in time he must have won Brown's complete trust, for soon he was handling more important assignments. My reports told of firms being driven to bankruptcy, men betrayed by friends and partners, and several deaths—all with Westman somewhere in the hazy background.

He proved his worth in an even bigger way when he engineered a pact with General Airlines that opened up vast new territory to his company. General Airlines carried metal from inland mines over the broad mountain range that rimmed the coast. Under their agreement, Allied Fisheries paid the cost of refrigerating their planes, and they carried fish on their return trips. Before that the planes had gone back empty, and the deal was mutually profitable.

Perhaps I heard before Brown that Westman was making a good thing of his job. Perhaps Brown knew, but elected not to object. Westman was a valuable aid. Whatever the circumstances, Westman was soon collecting, in bribes and under the board deals, money that must have totalled a fortune.

When the inevitable time came that Brown found himself menaced by Westman's machinations, it became evident that even my informants had not suspected the full scope of Westman's activities. Brown tried to fire him, and learned that Westman had acquired considerable stock in Allied Fisheries—where he had put the money he had fleeced on his new job. He proved strong enough to demand a stockholder meeting, and get it.

Brown presented a damaging, sub-

stantiated, report to the stockholders—but he had moved too late. Westman's activities had included winning the support of several other large stockholders, and the proxy vote of still more. It all ended with Brown out of a job, and Westman in as coordinating supervisor.

THE COUNCIL seemed to have forgotten him. I sent in my reports regularly, but never received more than mere acknowledgments of receipt. True, they had their hands full. Only by adroit behind the scenes maneuvering had they been able to maintain the balance of power among the contending stargroups. Westman was too minor a cog to be bothered with for now—I presumed.

Personally I was more concerned about Genevieve. She was often with Westman, but I was certain her happiness was slowly lessening. She must have expected him to marry her, but the months passed and he did not, and in time it became apparent that he never would.

Toward the end of Westman's second year on Madar I read in the news sheets that he had become engaged to the daughter of the chairman of the board of General Airlines. This was followed by an amalgamation of companies. With Westman as president. He was moving up fast.

Two months later Genevieve resigned—and went to work for Westman. Someone—Nietzsche, I believe—had said that a woman would prefer a ten percent stake in a superior man to a one hundred percent ownership of an average one. I was seeing the bitter truth of that now. More bitter because I, it seemed, had to be classed with the average men.

WITH WESTMAN attaining his new position of power, it was natural that he should move into government. He may have been working toward that from the beginning, or it may have been only that it was the next logical step upward.

He found the initial access quite simple. Heads of corporations were almost invariably invited into the World's controlling body, with posts commensurate with their professional level.

Another year passed, while the Council continued its adroit maneuvering, averting war in our turbulent stargroups, but settling nothing. I continued my observation of Westman, often thinking of Madar's government as a white rat that had unknowingly swallowed a virulent poison. For a time it continued its normal scurrying activity, but in time would come the startled pause as it felt the first inward pang, then the frantic agonized convolutions of distress. And finally the desperate attempts to disgorge the poison in its bowels.

WESTMAN had made friends and allies in the oligarchic government, planted his agents in key positions where he was able, and when he felt strong enough, instigated a minor upheaval that unseated a cabinet minister and replaced him with a Westman man.

The act jarred the rulers of Madar out of their lethargy. The Jorgenson clan recognized a formidable rival, and closed ranks to repel him.

The Jorgensons were descendants of an early governor of Madar, and through the years, with native shrewdness and ability, had built up their strength until now they were the dominant power on the planet. They controlled insurance, bonding,

and holding companies, and in addition held stock and directorships in other industries, and until now maintained a firm grasp on Madar's politics. When they united in concerted effort, no antagonist could stand against them.

Until Westman. The man played his hand resourcefully and with great craft. He had the initial advantage of the Jorgensons not realizing the deadliness of his purpose, the no-quarter manner in which he was prepared to fight. However, when a leading member of the family was assassinated, they learned the ruthlessness of their opponent—and like the white rat, they ceased their haphazard contortions and concentrated their vast energy on disgorging the poison that threatened to kill them.

Westman fought back, savagely. He had by this time organized a secret gestapo-type force that probably amazed the Jorgensons with its size and efficiency. They met constantly with impregnable blockades, and ferocious counteroffenses.

The battle then became more quiet, and more deadly. As I watched I began to think that Westman might win.

THE STRUGGLE had one beneficial effect. In their consolidation of strength against the internal enemy, the rulers of Madar made peace with Tintine. In return for minor face-saving concessions they relinquished their claim to the disputed metal-rich planet. The Council, within a reasonable time, should now be able to restore the bickering Worlds to a less inflammatory condition.

I was not to know how the titanic internal struggle would have ended, for soon after Madar's settlement with Tintine I heard again from Ben

Frank.

THE SPACE on the near wall lit up and once again Frank seemed in the same room with me. "Well, Dan boy, our little affair has been brought to a successful conclusion," he began. His blue, blue eyes were wide open now, filled with what can only be described as pure happiness. A triumph such as this represented the peak of satisfaction to his kind of man.

"You're referring to the Tintine matter, sir?" I asked.

"Precisely. Our catalyst did its work very well." He seemed in a talkative mood.

It was frustrating being just below administrative level—and so often only fractionally informed of Council plans. This time, however, I had put two and two together, and I was certain I had the answer. Inadvertently but in actuality, Westman's activities had brought about the cessation of hostilities among the contending stargroups. "Westman was the catalyst?" I asked.

"Very good, lad," he complimented. "We may be wasting your abilities in your present position. We must speak about that later."

"Thank you, sir. The Council put him in the vaults then, and later brought him to Madar?"

"Correct. He had overreached himself on Earth, and would undoubtedly have received a severe sentence. It seemed a shame to waste those gigantic capabilities. A situation such as presented itself in our neighboring stargroups was bound to appear somewhere, given enough time—where Westman's unique talents could be utilized."

"As they saying goes, his kind may never pass this way again," I mused.

"You are more right than you may

realize." His exhilaration had banished Frank's usual body lethargy. I waited, for I could see that he wanted to talk.

"Many men would see him as a scoundrel," Frank said, "and perhaps they'd be correct—he is ruthless and unscrupulous. But even they couldn't deny that he is a great man.

"I suppose there are men with his outlook in every generation," the aged one went on, "but few possess the strength and intelligence to bring their aspirations to realization. When they do they leave their marks on the pages of history books.

Frank was overspending his meager vitality, I could see, but I hoped he'd go on. I was eager to hear more.

"Basically Westman is a Ghengis Khan," he said, "a Vandal conqueror, a robber baron of Earth's early mass transportation age. Even though those men were often mere predators, they did immense good. Strictly in response to his inner drive Ghengis Khan brought about an interchange of culture that advanced both the East and the West a thousand years; the Vandals revitalized an empire, sweeping away a decadent aristocracy funneling resources into personal luxuries; the transportation barons opened up vast new territories to overcrowded nations." He paused. "It seems a shame he has to die."

My first reaction was shock. "You're going to kill Westman?" My voice revealed my incredulity.

Frank nodded. "We used him—once," he said, "but we could never do so again. He has grown too much, with so much more experience. Even the Council might not be able to control him now. And he is a man who must scheme and fight and achieve—without it life would be an empty thing to him. Loosening an

amoral, unpredictable force such as that in the Worlds would be inviting disaster."

I might agree with him, but I did not want to see Westman die. "I wish there were some other way," I said.

"There isn't," Frank was adamant. "You will have to kill him."
"I?"

THE COUNCIL had decided that my best avenue to Westman was through Genevieve Potvin. I had taken her to dinner a couple times the last month—her only connection with Westman for almost a year had been her job as his secretary—and I made an appointment for late that afternoon.

It took me twenty minutes to reach Westman's offices; the building was honeycombed with electrical devices and safety check points. I spent only a brief time with Genevieve. After the first greetings I asked her to put me through to Westman. "Tell him it's about a certain 1% equity," I directed her. I was admitted immediately.

"My silent partner," Westman greeted, rising and coming around his desk with his hand extended. I could ask for nothing more. I reached for his hand.

His grip passed mine, swiftly, and caught my wrist. He gave it a brutal twist and brought my arm up behind my back—and we were eyeball to eyeball. "It didn't work, Dan," he said evenly.

A moment later he had removed the ring from my middle finger and was examining it, noting the short poisoned plunger. "Rather primitive, isn't it?" he asked, speaking more to himself than to me. "But then I would be less prepared for that than something more sophisticated," he amended. "Frank is a sly one."

So he knew about Frank. The man was incredible. "Where did I slip up?" I asked.

"One of the little tricks I picked up along the way," he answered. "As you put out your hand the pupils of your eyes contracted, which meant that you were lying—or practicing some other deception.

"So now we play the next act," he said. "Ben Frank. I'll want him here, in person."

I had begun to shake my head when he said, "You don't think I'd hesitate to kill you now, do you?" He motioned toward the walls with a sweeping motion of one hand. "I have a dozen ways."

The words were spoken in a manner that left no doubt of their cold blooded sincerity—and I decided quickly that it would be wisest to leave the decision to Frank.

THIRTY FIVE MINUTES passed, with Westman sitting at his desk calmly going through routine papers, making notations on some, and signing others. I paced the floor. Once I felt a large drop of perspiration run down my rib cage.

Ben Frank's entrance was almost anticlimatic. The door opened silently and he drifted in, handling the controls on his magnetic float chair with long-accustomed ease.

And the moment had arrived. I had a quick sense of being a witness to a meeting of giants.

They sat in silence for a long minute, each weighing and measuring the other, until Westman spoke. "As you can see, I'm still alive."

Frank nodded negligently. "The mistake was mine. I should have known you'd never die so easily."

"You underestimated me," Westman said.

"Never that."

"Has it occurred to you that I could kill you now—right here?" Westman asked.

Frank disdained an answer, and Westman realized that he had made a bad move—Frank was not the kind of man to be frightened, or bluffed. "Forget that," he came as close as he was able to an apology. "What I brought you here for was to ask you for a job."

Frank's eyebrows raised.

"I'd like to be your assistant," Westman said.

A ripple of mirth burst from Frank's near immobile lips. "The C. J. Brown gambit," he chortled. "I make you my assistant, and six months later you have my job?"

"Exactly."

And suddenly everything had changed. "Are you—" Frank's voice faltered into silence—the first time I'd ever seen him uncertain, about anything. There was no puzzlement on his face, just a brief flickering of expression, as though so many considerations and ramifications were flashing through the keen mind that it needed a pause to sort them out and catalogue them.

"Think on it a moment," Westman advised, without pressure. "The answer is obvious."

"True, I'm an old man," Frank was still without an answer to his deliberations, voicing his thoughts aloud for his own consideration. "The last years I've stayed on only because a satisfactory replacement was not available. But you—? A man that ambitious—"

"Couldn't be trusted," Westman finished for him.

"How would you answer that?" Frank questioned, his intense intellect once again in evidence.

(cont. on page 105)

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Adolescence is usually the most difficult part of growing up, but it's worse for a—

TWEEN

J.F. BONE

Illustrated by Tony Gleeson

“**L**eonard,” Mr. Ellingsen said, “What on earth are you doing to your hair?”

“Nothing,” Lenny said uncomfortably. He glared at Mary Ellen and she looked at him with eyes of greenest innocence. Damned witch, Lenny thought. What Mr. Ellingsen should have said was what in hell is happening to your hair. At least his geography would be more accurate.

“Hmm,” Mr. Ellingsen said. “For a moment, it looked as though unseen hands were ruffling it. It was a thoroughly unpleasant sight. I have learned to endure long hair on young men, but I cannot stand watching it rise and fall like waves on a windy beach.”

The class laughed and Mary Ellen looked smugly virtuous.

“I didn’t do anything,” Lenny protested.

“Please don’t do it again,” Mr. Ellingsen said.

The class giggled and Lenny wished that he was miles away, or that Mary Ellen was; preferably the latter. Just why did she have to pick on him? He wished that he had never dated her last summer. All he’d done was kiss

her a couple of times. And he wouldn’t have done that if Sue Campbell hadn’t been in California with her parents. But the way she’d acted when Sue came back was like they’d been making out ever since Sue left.

It wasn’t true. He’d only tried to go further once, and she froze like an icicle. She turned off just like she’d turned a switch. He shrugged. If she wanted to be a cold tomato, that was her bag, but she needn’t have acted like she owned him. He dropped her like a hot potato and went back to Sue almost with relief. That was when she started hanging around and being obnoxious. But Sue didn’t like Mary Ellen and that kept the witch away until the end of winter term. Jealousy was strong medicine against witches, Lenny guessed, but it wasn’t perfect because Sue and Mary Ellen were talking to each other now.

That wasn’t good. Sue was impressionable, and she believed that crap Mary Ellen dished out. Mary Ellen wasn’t too truthful when she got going. In fact, she was a goddam liar. But Sue didn’t know that. Mary Ellen sure knew how to get Sue worked up.

A guy would be safer with a rattlesnake. At least the snake gave warning before it struck. And its poison was no worse than Mary Ellen's—now she was making cold chills run up and down his spine. They really ran, leaving icy little footprints on his vertebrae. His skin tingled and he shivered uncontrollably.

Mr. Ellingsen looked at him again. A grimace of annoyance twisted the teacher's pallid face.

Lenny began to itch. The urge to scratch was almost uncontrollable.

"Miss Jones," Mr. Ellingsen said.

Mary Ellen shifted her eyes to the teacher. The itching promptly stopped, although the cold spots remained.

"What is there about the back of Leonard's head that demands such intense scrutiny?" Mr. Ellingsen asked.

Mary Ellen blushed.

Lenny felt a mild satisfaction; it served her right. She didn't like being the center of attention. Witches never do. When things began to happen to him a month ago, he'd been suspicious, and after some reading of books in the school and public library he had become certain. He was bewitched. It wasn't something he could talk about, and there wasn't much he could do about it. After all, killing witches was no longer a public service, especially not when they were as pretty as Mary Ellen Jones. Anyway, she was more annoyance than danger. She couldn't really harm him now that he was carrying a clove of garlic in his pocket and wore a cross and a St. Christopher medal. And in three weeks he'd be graduating from dear old John Tyler High and that would be the last of Mary Ellen. He was going to join the Air Force and volunteer for foreign service.

Mary Ellen eyed Mr. Ellingsen



with distaste. He didn't *have* to call attention to her. He was typical of all that was wrong with male high school teachers, Mary Ellen thought moodily. Possibly he would have turned out better if he had more body and less brains, but slight, balding, nearsighted. Mr. Ellingsen with his high precise voice, and quick birdlike movements was a distinct washout. He was almost as bad as Lenny Stone. She shook her head. No—that wasn't being fair to Mr. Ellingsen. Lenny was unique. Nobody could be as bad—as ugly—as inconsiderate—as horrid as Leonard Joseph Stone. Lord! How she disliked him! It was an emotion that might well develop into a first class hatred. After all, Mr. Ellingsen was intelligent in a stupid sort of way, which made him different from Lenny. Still, that hardly compensated for his defects. He wasn't human—but then what teacher is? And he was awfully mean to poor Miss Marsden. Everyone knew Anna Marsden was in love with him, but Mr. Ellingsen never gave her a break. He didn't sit with her at the faculty table or walk with her in the hall. He was too wrapped up in Physics to even see a mere English teacher. He was absolutely insufferable. Mary Ellen eyed Ellingsen speculatively. He just might lose some of his offensive superiority if one of his experiments went sour, but nothing ever went wrong with an Ellingsen demonstration. They always went off like clockwork and always proved their point. Mary Ellen sighed. She wished she could do something for Miss Marsden, or do something to Mr. Ellingsen. Either alternative would be more pleasant than just sitting here and listening to things she didn't want to understand. She settled back into a comfortable daydream of

experiments going wrong to the complete frustration of Mr. Ellingsen

"The object of this demonstration," Mr. Ellingsen said, "is to show that the force of gravity is to all intents and purposes a constant when substances of relatively small mass are involved, and that under these conditions objects will fall at the same velocity regardless of their size and weight. Of course, this is within reasonable limits. I suppose that if you dealt with something as large as the moon compared with something as small as a steel ball bearing, you would find that the moon would reach the earth sooner because it would attract the earth to it more than the steel ball would, but insofar as the earth's attraction to the moon is concerned, the speeds of attraction would be the same, roughly about 16 feet per second, per second."

"What I'm going to do is show you that a ping pong ball and a steel ball bearing of equal size will fall at the same speed."

"Wouldn't the steel ball hit the ground a lot sooner if you dropped them off a real high place like the top of the clock tower?" Bill Reichart asked. Bill was an honor student and always asked questions. Mr. Ellingsen liked it because it gave him a chance to explain.

"Of course it would, but there are other factors involved."

"Like air resistance?" Lenny asked.

"Exactly. The air would slow the ping pong ball. But if you dropped the two balls through a vacuum they'd fall at the same speed."

"Exactly the same speed?" Reichart persisted.

"Theoretically no—actually yes. The steel ball should attract the earth toward it more than the ping pong

ball, but their relative masses are so infinitesimally small as compared with the mass of the earth that the difference is calculable only mathematically and would be expressed in a fractional skillionth of a nanosecond. At any rate, there is no instrument in this school that can measure the difference." Mr. Ellingsen was sidestepping the issue. Actually, he wasn't as sure of himself as he had been a few minutes ago. There was something about gravity nibbling at the edges of his memory, but he consoled himself with the thought that if he didn't know, neither did the members of the class. He thought wryly that this was probably why he was teaching high school rather than working for a Nobel prize in physics. He simply didn't know enough.

Bill Reichart nodded. "You wouldn't want to bring up Einstein's math?" he asked.

"Not now," Ellingsen said. The class looked relieved. "I'll try to explain," he continued, ignoring the collective subliminal sigh from the students, "but I'll do it with this apparatus. You see, all I want to show at this time is that within practical limits the earth's attraction is a constant. Indeed, it is enough of a constant that Sir Isaac Newton used it as a base for his theory of gravitation and to develop a mathematics that still is useful, despite later discoveries. From a practical viewpoint we have no need for an analysis of gravity that is more accurate than Newton's unless we become astronomers or astronauts."

"Now let us examine the demonstration apparatus." Mr. Ellingsen pointed to the two clear plastic tubes behind him that reached from the floor almost to the high ceiling.

"These tubes contain a reasonably hard vacuum," Mr. Ellingsen said.

"This will eliminate air resistance. They also contain two dissimilar objects—a ping pong ball and a steel ball bearing, and some electronic apparatus to measure time. The left hand tube contains the ball bearing and the right hand tube contains the ping pong ball. The ping pong ball has a few iron filings glued to its surface. Both balls are held in the top of the tubes by electromagnets and there is a sensing device in the bottom of each tube. When I touch this button it will cut the current to the magnets and both balls will be released simultaneously. Now watch what happens"

Mr. Ellingsen pushed the button.

The ping pong ball smacked against the bottom of the right hand tube but the steel ball remained at the top of its container. With an exclamation of annoyance Mr. Ellingsen punched the button a second time. "Apparently the magnet didn't release," he said uncomfortably. "Well—we'll try again. It's no trouble to reset the balls. All we have to do is turn on the current and invert—" He voice stopped and his eyes bulged. For the steel ball was floating hesitantly down the inside of the tube—moving an inch at a time, pausing occasionally as though to determine whether it was safe to descend another inch. As Mr. Ellingsen peered at the ball, it shivered coyly and retreated to the top of the tube.

"I think I am going mad!" Mr. Ellingsen muttered. "This simply cannot happen. It repeals the Law of Gravity."

Mary Ellen giggled. The sound held a triumphant note.

The whole tube quivered, rose slowly from its metallic base and floated towards the ceiling. Mr. Ellingsen made a frantic grab for the

plastic column—and missed.

The class giggled.

Beads of sweat dotted Ellingsen's forehead, as he watched the tube snuggle against the ceiling.

"That's a good trick, sir," Bill Reichart said, "How do you do it?"

"I don't," Mr. Ellingsen said unhappily. "It's doing it all by itself."

"I'll bet you do it with wires," Mary Ellen offered helpfully.

"Why should I?" Mr. Ellingsen said in a harassed voice.

"I don't know. Maybe it's a teaching device."

"I intended to teach you about the law of gravity—not to repeal it," Mr. Ellingsen replied pettishly. "Both you and I know perfectly well that a thing like this can't happen. It's a physical impossibility. Yet there it is," he gestured hopelessly at the ceiling. "It should be down here."

"But it isn't, sir," Reichart said. "We can all see that. What makes it stay up there?"

"If I knew, do you think I'd be here?" Mr. Ellingsen said. "I'd be so busy patenting the process I wouldn't have time to teach. What you're looking at is antigravity." He looked up at the tube accusingly. "Come down this instant!" he ordered.

The tube dropped on Mr. Ellingsen's head. He went down as though he had been poleaxed—and mixed with the horrified gasp from the class, Lenny could hear Mary Ellen's gloating giggle

LATER, when Mr. Hardesty, the vice-principal, tried to establish the cause of the accident that put Mr. Ellingsen in the hospital with a mild concussion, he came to the conclusion that everyone in Physics 3 was stark, raving mad—including Mr. Ellingsen. The matter was quickly dropped and

everyone tried to forget it. Of course, no one did and it was a six days wonder until it was replaced with something else. In HomeEc class, about a week later and for no reason at all, plates and glassware sailed across the room and shattered against the wall. Mrs. Albritton, the teacher, was put under the doctor's care, suffering from nervous collapse. Mr. Hardesty told reporters from the school paper that Mrs. Albritton hadn't been feeling well prior to the incident and that everyone hoped she would be better soon. There was no truth in either statement.

The high school baseball team, with worse material than it had the previous year, when it had a 0-10 season, won games with depressing regularity, and by lopsided scores. The ball, no matter who hit it, went for extra bases. And the pitching was uncanny. The only games the team lost were ones a long distance from home, and those losses were by almost as nightmarish scores as the wins near at hand.

"I can't explain it," Mr. Curtis said, as he flexed his Mr. America muscles, "unless we've got a friendly gremlin. I've never coached a team like this. At home we can't do a thing wrong, and on the road we can't do a thing right. If I didn't know better, I'd swear that there's a sorcerer in the stands casting spells for our side. I saw one pitch last night change directions twice. I can't figure it." Curtis' muscles were fine, but his eyes were a bit weak or were playing tricks on him. At least that was what most people figured after listening. And after Mr. Hardesty talked to him it was noticeable that he didn't talk so much about the antics of his baseball team.

Lenny figured it was Mary Ellen's

doing. Mr. Curtis was wrong only in the matter of sex. It wasn't a sorcerer. It was a witch. Mary Ellen liked baseball. And she liked to win. Lenny would have bet his last dime that Mary Ellen had hexed the entire baseball team as well as being responsible for everything that went wrong in school . . . and he would have been right.

As Mary Ellen saw it, Anna Marsden was well on her way to becoming an old maid. Even though she was pretty and intelligent, she was twenty five, which was on the downhill side toward thirty. And everyone knew that thirty was *ancient*! That was mainly because she had to fall in love with that awful stick of a Mr. Ellingsen. Now Mr. Curtis, the baseball coach, was much nicer. Not only did he have hair and muscles, but he had been hanging around the English class for weeks. He said it was because one of his players was having trouble with English Comp, but it was obvious that he liked Miss Marsden. Miss Marsden never gave him a break, which was silly. All she could see was that skinny Mr. Ellingsen—and he never noticed her at all. Miss Marsden would do a lot better with Mr. Curtis. Now if . . .

The scandal erupted two nights later when Mr. Ellingsen broke into Mr. Curtis' apartment and found Miss Marsden. It was only because Mr. Ellingsen was just out of the hospital that Curtis was still alive. Ellingsen had hit him with a bronze table lamp which should have fractured his skull, but due in equal parts to the hardness of Curtis' head and Ellingsen's lack of strength, all the baseball coach suffered was a split scalp. Ellingsen apparently had cause for his actions, since he had been married to Anna Marsden for nearly two months.

"Damned homewrecker!" Mr. Ellingsen snapped from his cell in the city jail. "Casanova! Wife stealer! I hope he's crippled for life. But he won't be," he added gloomily. "I hit the oaf on the head!"

"I never knew she was married, and she never told me," Mr. Curtis explained "I asked her to come up to my place to look at my Hogarth engravings. She could have refused if she wanted to, but she didn't."

"I don't know what happened. I can't explain it at all," Miss Marsden said wildly. "I love Reggie. I always will. We were going to keep our marriage a secret this year because of this silly school board rule about married couples working in the same school, and earn the down payment on a house. Everything was wonderful until Bill Curtis began chasing after me. I didn't like it and I wanted to tell him so, but I couldn't. I didn't want to go to his apartment, but when he asked me, I said yes. I tried to tell him I was married, but the words wouldn't come. It was like I was sitting outside myself watching something move me like a puppet. It was horrible!"

Sue Chambers ran off with Bill Reichart and got married and their families were squabbling about an annulment. Bill didn't seem worried about it and Sue had forgotten about becoming a medical missionary and decided to become a mother instead. Somehow she developed an appalling domesticity that made Lenny oddly grateful that things turned out as they did, although for a couple of days he despised Sue and hated Bill. Fortunately it was close enough to graduation that the happy couple were assured of getting their degrees. After that it wouldn't matter. Reichart was going to college and Sue would go

with him.

The baseball team won the remainder of its games by lopsided scores, went to the state tournament and was eliminated. Mary Ellen was home in bed with the flu.

Old Mr. Dodds took the wraps off his English History course the last two weeks before finals and gave his students enough details about the Regency Period to arouse a burning love for skatology in the breasts of students who had never cared for history at all. He also gave the class a blanket "A". He was promptly suspended for conduct unbecoming a teacher and went chortling into retirement.

"I've been wanting to do that for thirty years," he chuckled as he made his way through a crowd of admiring students after his last session with the School Board. "For thirty years I've taught emasculated pap for children and I finally got tired of it. This time I gave them the facts."

"What do you intend to do now?" a reporter asked. "The Board can't allow you to continue teaching. They've got you labelled as a menace to society. In Socrates' time they'd have fed you a hemlock cocktail."

"I couldn't care less," Dodds said. "It makes no difference what they do. I'm six months past retirement so they can't take away my pension. That was my last class. I stayed on only because I was asked." Mr. Dodds chuckled. "I guess I have finally become too old to be worried about anything. I was tired of distorting the truth. Put it down to senile dementia if you wish."

"Your diagnosis may be correct," the reporter said, "but I doubt it."

"You might be right," Dodds replied, "That could have been the only sane act of my entire life."

And while this was going on and

the staid order of John Tyler High School was being destroyed, things were happening to Lenny. His shoelaces came untied. His books disappeared. Drinks spilled on him. He stumbled and fell in empty corridors, and suffered embarrassing rips in his trousers. Things were constantly getting in his way. Accidents clung to him as though he was their patron saint. He developed alertness and a sixth sense of impending disaster that enabled him to dodge things like falling fire axes and flower pots. Lenny was certain that Mary Ellen was behind the trouble. He was always conscious of her presence. And gradually his feeling of resentment and persecution turned from fear to a growing anger. Enough was enough. He had no desire to become a statistic, but he was damned if he'd spend the rest of the school year looking over his shoulder or listening for things that went bump in the dark. He was damned if he was going to duck every time a bird flew over his head. He'd see Mary Ellen alone and settle this once and for all.

It took two days to corner her in a deserted corridor.

"I've taken all I'm going to," Lenny told her fiercely. "Now get off my back and stay off."

"You just think you have, Lenny Stone," Mary Ellen replied. "I haven't even started on you!" Her eyes widened and her slim body tensed. "You're going to regret the day you jilted me!"

"I never—" Lenny began.

"Don't lie! You kissed me last summer, and then went right over to Sue Chambers."

"Good Grief—did you think I meant anything? That was just common courtesy. You girls expect to be kissed. I've known that from Junior

High."

"No boy ever kissed me before. You lied to me and you'll pay for it."

"The way you're overreacting a guy would think we made out," Lenny said. "I wouldn't touch you with tongs. You're a weirdo of the worst kind. And if you're worrying about me kissing you—don't. It won't happen again. Just lay off, that's all I ask. I don't want any part of you, anytime. Get out of my life and stay out of it. I don't give a damn what you do to anyone else, even though I know you're responsible for everything that's wrong around here. I don't know how you do it, but so help me, if you try to put the whammy on me again I'll—"

"You'll what?"

"I don't know—but it'll be something drastic."

Mary's body tensed and Lenny felt an overwhelming weight settle on his shoulders. His knees buckled under the strain and his body sagged as it was forced toward the floor. "I'd love to see you crawl!" Mary Ellen gritted. "You snake!"—and he was a snake, complete with skin and scales. He wanted to slither away from here. An empty high school corridor was no place for a snake. He shivered and straightened. This was wrong! He wasn't a snake, he was a man! Sweat poured from his face as he forced his sagging body erect, hands clawing at the air for support. One hand struck Mary Ellen's shoulder, and as it did, a sharp gasp came from the girl. The weight on his back was gone, his scales vanished. Volition rushed back to his muscles—and Mary Ellen writhed on her back on the corridor floor looking up at him with hate-filled eyes. "You pushed me!" she gasped. "You knocked me down!"

"I told you I'd do something if you

tried any more fancy tricks," Lenny said heavily. "So long Mary—see you around." He turned from her and walked away, slowly at first. Then he began to run. He skidded around a corner and disappeared.

Mary Ellen rose to her feet. Rage radiated from her. He had made a fool of her again. The window beside her exploded in a burst of flying glass. Two girls coming down the corridor were slammed against the wall. Mary stood in the center of a whirlpool of fury. The floor heaved, a crack appeared in the ceiling, chunks of plaster fell, and a rain of fine gray dust drifted down in crazy patterns through the tortured air.

Mary gasped at the ruin surrounding her. Was *she* doing this? The thought that Lenny might be right crossed her mind, followed by a wave of terror. For if he *was* right, she'd be expelled—maybe even sent to jail! But on the heels of her terror came another thought. If Lenny was right and she did have this kind of power, there must be a way of controlling it—Mary Ellen's lips curled in a peculiar half smile that was hard and unpleasant. Lenny Stone would whistle a different tune when she got through with him! Meantime, she'd better do something about those two girls. They had seen her and the wreckage that surrounded her, and they would talk. They'd cackle like hens. She'd make them forget—make them forget everything! She began walking slowly toward them . . .

EMILY JONES intruded into her husband's martini with the expertise of nearly two decades of marriage. "John," she said, "this can't go on much longer. Mary Ellen's already damaged the Ellingsen's marriage, got poor Mr. Curtis beat up, put Mrs.

Albritton in the hospital, ruined Mr. Dodd's reputation, interfered with the lives of Bill Reichart and Susan Chambers, and made amnesiacs of Ellen Andress and Tami Johnston." Emily eyed her husband accusingly. "You're her father," she said. "Do something! You should have known she'd be a tween, before we were done here."

"You're overreacting," Jones said, "Just what can I do? Who can do anything with a tween?"

"We should have watched her more closely. It's our fault."

"For heavens sake, stop acting like the natives. It's not our fault. Tweens are as old as history. Can't you remember what you were like?"

Emily blushed, "I can," she said, "and that's what worries me."

"Damn it!" Jones said, "It's bad enough living in this crazy breast-beating society without adopting its attributes. I figure we have at least another six months. Kids grow up fast in this environment, but not that fast. We'll be in the Arizona desert working with the Navaho by June and after that phase is over we can go home. I suppose living around sexually mature youngsters fourteen or fifteen years old has some effect but it'll wear off once we get into a more stable environment. However, I'll put your data into the matricizer and run it out."

"What, good will that do? What we need is a way to handle Mary Ellen right now. We aren't going to be able to carry this bag of worms by ourselves. You know that."

"We're not going to do a thing as long as they don't suspect her, we're going to keep our hands off. I'm in the final phase of this study and if I abort it now we'll wind up in Limbo, or on the backside of the moon, or some other misbegotten place where

we'd be conveniently forgotten. We'd spend the rest of our lives scratching flea bites and shaking dust out of our clothing. We simply have to stick it out."

Emily shook her head. "I think you're wrong, John. There are three weeks left, and by that time if she keeps growing Mary Ellen can destroy the school. I don't even want to think of what can happen to the graduation ceremony if she comes to it in as foul a mood as she was in this afternoon. She uprooted a whole row of petunias along the front walk as she came in. Didn't leave a speck of earth on the roots and she never came within three feet of them! I don't think she noticed the damage that followed her from the bus and no one was on the street. No, John, we simply must leave."

"We can't. I can't even pack my records in a week."

"Call a moving company."

"Are you mad? One of those people might be intelligent enough to know what he was packing. Do you want to blow our cover?"

"I want to get out of here."

"Why? No one has accused us of anything. No one suspects Mary Ellen. We can hold out another two or three weeks."

"I suppose you want to wait until she kills someone. Do you want your daughter to be a murderess?"

"She isn't going to kill anyone. She's been raised to respect life."

"And how much does that mean to a tween in the middle of an emotional storm?"

"Damn it, Emily! I'm not going to blow fifteen year's work just to keep an adolescent from acting like an idiot!"

"I wasn't thinking of us—or even of Mary Ellen," Emily said, "I was

thinking of the people around us. They're nice inoffensive folks, but they don't really understand what children can do. They take a dim view of vandalism, mayhem and murder, and they have absolutely no experience handling tweens. If Mary Ellen is discovered as the cause of all this they might even try to restrain her."

Jones gulped. . He had a mental picture of what might happen, and it wasn't pleasant. A chilly grue squiggled down his spine. He shivered and not entirely from the cold. Once the plaster stopped falling and the bodies were removed from the wreckage his cover would be blown wide open. And naturally, people would draw the wrong conclusions, and a century of study and preparation would go down the drain. The prospect was appalling. "They'd think we were spies," he said, "They might even think we were a prelude to invasion."

"Well—aren't we?"

"Not that way. We want to open trade, not war. We want to exchange technology."

"Doesn't it amount to the same thing in the end? We'll eventually make an economic conquest, and that can be just as bad as a military one."

"No one gets killed."

"Not directly. But the inferior culture doesn't survive. It gets replaced. And in the end we conquer as surely as if we came with bombs and blast-ers."

John shrugged. "That's not our affair. We have nothing to do with the economics of empire. We simply collect demographic and sociopolitical data."

"You're being awfully narrow-minded. Can't you remember what happened to Enserala? Or won't you think of what happened to the primi-

tive societies here when they came into contact with Europe? The primitive society always dies except for a few taboos and inconsequential customs."

Jones sighed. He couldn't forget it even though he tried. The path of empire was strewn with the corpses of civilizations and cultures. It was inevitable. One could take some comfort in the thought that nothing could be done to a Class B culture that was half as bad as the things the culture did to itself if it developed in the direction of nation-states. This world had a fairly poor prognosis. Indeed it was a miracle that it has lasted as long as it had. But there was a hard streak of self-preservation in its peoples. At least they'd never started a nuclear war. Somehow despite their mass hysterias, their irrationality, their uncontrolled appetites, their overbreeding, their prides, ideologies and bigotry, they never took that catastrophic final step. It had aroused Imperial curiosity several decades ago after the first surveys gave the planet a potential lifespan of about fifty standard years. The world had already lasted almost a hundred and seemed in no particular haste to exterminate itself. Yet the inhabitants were to all intents and purposes a non-survival type. They were hardly more than tweens without psi—children masquerading as adults. And their continued existence drew the attention of Empire. They might be useful.

"They need to trade with us, Jones said, "We can educate them in the ways of peace and self control."

"You don't mention that trade is the lifeblood of our society," Emily said. "Without it, we'd have died long ago."

"It gives us a reason for existence," he admitted.

"And increases our power and prestige, and gives our people places to go and things to do."

"It's not our fault that our ancestors overpopulated our world."

"I won't argue that. We're stuck with a demographic fact and we have learned to live with it, but I don't like thinking that this beautiful world will become another Lyrane."

"Emily—we need this world. The Council has it on first priority. Even though I like these people and don't want to see them hurt, I can't scrap my own loyalties. The survey and investigation *must* go on. Without data we can accomplish nothing."

"They're not going to forgive us if Mary Ellen runs wild," Emily answered.

Jones shrugged. It was a rotten little problem. "Does she hate anyone?" he asked, "or is she behaving in a reasonably normal tween fashion?"

"I think she doesn't like Lenny Stone, but mainly she's peaking and bottoming out emotionally."

"Is Stone that kid who was hanging around most of last summer? The one whose parents work in the city?"

Emily nodded.

"I can't see why she'd hate him. He's not worth that much thought."

"She's a tween."

"Poor Lenny. I should warn him. It might be well if he left town."

"He'd think you were crazy," Emily said.

"Hey! what's going on here? Are you two plotting something?" Mary Ellen's voice preceded her into the room. "I come down for a glass of milk and find you two whispering over martinis like a pair of spies. What's up?"

Jones looked at his daughter and choked back a reply that sprung to his lips. She was a very satisfactory

tween, leggy, elf-faced with eyes of clearest green that were almost too large. Her bones were good and her body was beginning to mature. Odd that he hadn't noticed—but he'd been busy the last few months. She was tween all right. There was something fey, alien and appealing about her, like a Keane painting come to life. "It's grown-up talk, sprout," he said, "None of your business."

"We were talking about your future," Emily said.

"Maybe you ought to let me in on it," Mary Ellen said.

"We will, in due time," Emily said blandly. "This talk was about college and money and a career—the kind of background data we have to talk about before we put the savings account on the line."

Such a magnificent liar, John thought with admiration. The diplomatic service lost a star performer when Emily married and went with him on this mission.

"After all, dear, you're our only child and we are concerned about you. The way time passes and the way you kids grow nowadays it's almost no time before you're adults. You'll even be able to vote this fall and chances are you'll be away from home and in college."

"I don't think I want to go to college."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm sort of tired of school. It's getting to be a real drag. I think I'd like to get a job, like maybe with the paper, the U.N. or the Peace Corps."

"You're old enough, but you'd be better off in school."

"As usual, you don't understand," Mary Ellen said. "I have to get out. It's—you know—a drag. Irrelevant."

"Stop mouthing," John said. "In the

first place I don't know, and in the second there's nothing more relevant to a modern technological society than education."

"You sound like a teacher, Daddy."

"Oh—I won't stop you if you want to get a job. You'll learn a lot from the experience. And besides, if you earn money you can pay board which will help our budget."

"Mercenary," Mary Ellen said.

Jones grinned. The conversation was safely sidetracked. He hoped that neither the strain nor the relief showed in his face. It had taken a genuine effort to keep from blurting it out when Mary Ellen had wanted a straight answer badly enough to push for it. If it hadn't been for Emily, he might have done just that. He thought bitterly that life had some damnably unpleasant episodes during its passage. This was going to be one of them. There was no question that the girl was dangerous . . . He'd have to warn Lenny . . . And he'd have to be prepared to brainwash the kid if he wouldn't listen to reason . . .

JOHAN JONES leaned over the table in the back of McGonigle's Pizza Parlor and looked at the skinny kid with the shock of black hair who sat on the base of his spine and eyed a half-consumed Idiot's Delight pizza, and an empty coke bottle. The boy's face was moody and introspective.

"Are you Lenny Stone?" Jones asked.

"Yeah—that's me."

"I'm Mary Ellen's father."

"I remember you from last summer. And if Mary Ellen's said anything about me, she's lying."

"It's not that, I want to talk with you."

"No way. I don't want anything to do with you—or your daughter. Any-

thing related to Mary Ellen is bad news."

"I don't care what you want. I must warn you. Your life is in danger. Mary Ellen is capable of destroying you. I'm trying to do you a favor."

Lenny shook his head. "Naw—she can't hurt me. All she can do is hurt my friends."

"That's not very charitable."

"Who said I was charitable? Look. Mr. Jones, I hate her guts. She pesters me. She broke up my thing with Sue Chambers. She louses up my classes. The only favor you could do me would be to move far away and take Mary Ellen with you."

"I've considered that," Jones said. He would have been amused if he weren't so worried. Lenny and Emily had the same solution, and the same objections still applied. He couldn't move—not now. It was Lenny who'd have to go. Mary Ellen would murder him! Lenny was a poor innocent idiot playing with the trigger of a loaded machine gun. "The only trouble is that I can't move right now. But maybe you could. I'll pay the expenses."

"No way," Lenny said. "No girl is going to run me out of town, and besides my folks wouldn't let me go." He eyed Jones with a mixture of suspicion and curiosity. He felt drawn to the man. There was none of the strangeness about him that marked his daughter.

"I wish I could do this easily," Jones said, "but I can't. Somehow I have to make you understand that my daughter can kill you, and that she'll probably do just that if you stay around. She has powers most people don't possess."

"You're telling me? She's a witch." Lenny nodded. "I've known that for weeks, but nobody believes me when

I tell them. She hexed Mr. Ellingsen. She whammied the baseball team, she—

"She's not a witch. She's perfectly normal."

"Ha!" Lenny eyed Jones speculatively and wondered if he'd gone too far. Fathers weren't noted for tolerating kids who bad-mouthed their daughters. But oddly enough Mr. Jones wasn't affected. He might love Mary Ellen, although Lenny couldn't see why, but the love didn't affect his temper. "Look, sir," Lenny said "I took Mary Ellen out last summer, I kissed her a few times, but we didn't do anything else, no matter what she says."

"She hasn't said anything except that she hates you. Why did you stop dating?"

"She got too possessive. Acted like she owned me. I didn't like it very much, so I dropped her. A week or so later she chewed me out and told me she hated me."

"When was that?"

"Last September." Lenny shrugged. "She kept telling me all fall and winter term. Kept saying, 'Just you wait Lenny Stone. I'll fix you!'"

Jones shivered. "Get out of town Lenny. I know what I'm talking about. You haven't got a chance."

"But she can't really hurt me. She's tried."

"She hasn't got her full powers yet," Jones said. "The best thing you can do is get away while you still can. Get lost. Vanish. Visit relatives. Don't come back until we're gone. I'm leaving in June—by the tenth I'll be far from here and so will Mary Ellen. You'd be safe then."

"Hey—you're really worried."

"You damn well know I am." Jones stared at Lenny as though he could force his fears and concern into the

young man's mind. The light from the window fell on Lenny's face. It had a stark quality not normally found in an adolescent.

Lenny shook his head. "It's my graduation as much as hers," He said, "I belong there as much as she does. I'm staying."

Jones sighed. "All right Lenny, let's do it the hard way."

"What do you mean by that?"

"This," Jones said. His face hardened and Lenny watched him with mild uneasiness. He was going to get mad after all.

"Are you mad at me for calling Mary Ellen a witch? Are you—hey—leggo—you can't—" Lenny's voice ran down and stopped as he sat with glassy eyes clamped in a fixed stare on Jones' tense face.

This has to be fast, Jones thought. He had perhaps a minute before one of Pop McGonigle's teen age customers was going to notice that Lenny was somewhere on cloud nine. He marshaled what he thought were the most important things for Lenny's safety, gave the necessary instructions, planted the posthypnotic suggestions and awakened Lenny.

"Goodbye Lenny, and good luck," he said.

"Sorry, sir, but I couldn't leave anyway. My parents would object, and I don't have any relatives."

Jones smiled. "Well—you've been warned. I guess that's all I can do . . ." He walked out of the store feeling reasonably happy. By tomorrow, Lenny should be a hundred miles or more from here . . .

Mary Ellen faced her father across the dinner table. "What were you talking about with Lenny Stone down at McGonigle's?" She asked. "And don't say you weren't because I saw you. I want to know."

"Now Mary—" Emily protested.

"I want to know!"

"That's no way to talk to your father."

"I don't care—you can't touch me. I've got something that makes me bigger than either of you. I've found out all about it."

"Is the high school still standing?"

Jones asked. Sweat broke out on his forehead. He was conscious of a horrid compulsion to tell everything. He clenched his teeth. Mary had at last arrived at control of her powers. She was strong—as strong as Emily had been. He was right when he told Lenny that he couldn't control her—but he hadn't dreamed how right he was. He'd thought he could deny her. That was his worst mistake.

Suddenly he was suspended in midair looking down at the tight angry face of his daughter. The thought that she had learned a lot in a very short time dominated his brain. He had a reasonable certainty that he wasn't going to be hurt physically, even though his position was ridiculous. Adults simply didn't levitate. That was kid stuff.

"Mary! Put your father down this minute!" Emily ordered. She couldn't resist the wry thought that she would love to be in her daughter's place right now. But of course she wasn't, and after all, she couldn't have done a thing like this to John. Still, he *was* a stubborn, opinionated and unreasonable man at times and a good shaking would be him a world of good.

"I want to know what he was talking to Lenny about," Mary Ellen said, "and I'm not going to let him down till I do." She smiled a tight, hard, smug little smile. "I've found out what I can do—and how to do it," she said. "I'm maybe the most powerful person in the world. And you're going

to tell me what I want to know and do what I want you to do—or—I'll—"

"**Y**OU'LL WHAT?" Lenny asked. He stood in the kitchen door, looking at the suddenly frozen tableau. There was a solid thump as Jones' buttocks made contact with the floor, followed by three lesser thumps as heels and head followed the example of his behind. He scrambled to his feet, his face a study in anger and embarrassment.

"You!" Mary Ellen screeched at Lenny. "Go away! Get out of here!"

"Why?"

"Thanks," Jones said, "I'm glad you showed up, but you should be running for your life."

"Mom said you did a pretty good job for a quickie," Lenny said. "You left only a couple of loose ends. But those were enough. You gave me no motivation that would stand probing. I don't know that I told you but I can't hide anything from Mom. Anyway, it looks as though I came just in time."

"You did. I'm too old to appreciate being the centrum of a psi effect."

"I told you to get out of here," Mary Ellen said, glaring at Lenny.

"Get lost," Lenny said.

Jones shuddered. In about ten seconds there would be bloodshed.

"I am going to wring you out and hang you up to dry," Mary Ellen said. "I am going to smash you and shred the pieces. I am going to break you into little bits. I know what I can do!"

"Big talk," Lenny said. He stood in front of her, his face twisted into a mocking grin. "There's a lot of hot air in you that ought to be let out," he said. "You're all puffed up. Your hubris is showing. You need deflating."

Mary Ellen ground her teeth and

her face turned livid with anger.

"Run!" Emily gasped. "You've gone too far! She'll kill you!"

The air in the room thickened and writhed and became a gelid something that wasn't air. Forces gathered, poised, pulsed, and as Mary Ellen paused to focus the effect Lenny reached out and touched her. Something snatched Mary Ellen, spun her through the air and bounced her off the floor! The room shook, the walls creaked, plaster fell, and a dead calm descended upon the Jones kitchen.

Emily's eyes opened with a mixture of amazement and realization. Jones grinned, and Mary Ellen looked at Lenny with hate-filled eyes. "You did it again!" she said, "Damn you!"

"It's a good thing you have a well-padded behind," Lenny said. "That was quite a wallop."

"It hurts," Mary Ellen said.

"Maybe it'll teach you not to act stupid," Lenny said. "I told your dad that you couldn't hurt me. You can't. You and I—we're complements. We cancel out. You're a psi positive, I'm negative. It's a defense mechanism our race has had from the beginning. We'd never have survived if a bunch of nutty tweens could damage each other and everyone else because they had no self control. Of course psi effects were useful to discourage predators and other big terrifying things, but except for telepathy they're no good to help the race become civilized. When you can't lie you've gotta be honest. But psychokinetics such as you have are no good for anything nowadays."

"What are you talking about? I don't get it."

"Don't worry, you will as soon as your mom gets through talking to you. My Mom told me about it before she sent me over here. And I guess

it's a good thing she did. You were making an idiot out of yourself and you might have done something real bad. You can't help being a tween any more than I can—it's part of growing up. But you can help being stupid."

Mary Ellen got slowly to her feet. It dawned on her that she was abysmally ignorant, and from the expressions on her parent's faces she realized that she was the only one who was. Her parents knew exactly what Lenny was saying. It wasn't fair, she thought. And from the relaxed smile on her father's face she was certain that whatever had happened, it was something that took a monkey off his back. The thought was ambivalent.

"Just keep a hand on her, Lenny," Jones said. "Emily's bound to have her bracelets around somewhere. She never throws anything away." Jones sighed with relief. "I suppose I should have guessed. You practically told me down at McGonigle's, but I wasn't thinking very well. I had a mental picture of you on a marble slab."

"Don't worry about the bracelets," Lenny said. "Mom gave me hers. She figured you might need them." He reached into his jacket pocket and took out a plain gold bracelet. There wasn't anything unusual about it except that it locked with a final-sounding click when he closed it around Mary Ellen's wrist. "I'm wearing the mate to it," Lenny said, pushing back the left sleeve of his jacket to show an identical bracelet around his lean wrist. "She can't do anything now. As long as I'm around, she's neutralized."

"It's a miracle!" Emily said. "To think that there was a complementary—why the odds against it are in the millions!"

"Not quite," Lenny said. "You see, Mrs. Jones, my folks were transferred

from Chicago because my psych profile and Mary Ellen's were almost identical. The—the Council?"—he paused and Jones nodded. "The Council," Lenny continued, "thought Mary Ellen would go tween earlier on this world than on Lyrane—something to do with the kind of sunlight and the shortness of the years. Since my pattern fitted hers to four decimal points, they figured I was almost certainly complementary; so they sent my parents here. I guess you have a higher research priority than Dad. Anyway, I don't know much about these things."

"I expect we should have told Mary Ellen," Emily said.

"You should have," Lenny said. "Twens aren't really stupid or uncooperative, we're merely young."

"Have you learned the standing rules?" Jones asked.

"No, but Mom said that was why we never got in touch. We were ready if needed, but we weren't supposed to contact you. That was why she broke me off with Mary Ellen last summer. I kinda liked her, but Mom brainwashed it out of me. It might have been better if she hadn't. Besides, she thinks you're crazy to bring a girl here."

"Mary Ellen was born here," Emily said.

"You're going to stay with us, of course," Jones said.

"Naturally. Your assignment's about

over and Mom wants me to go home for advanced training. I think I'd like to be a psychologist and you can't get that sort of education on this world. My folks say it's all right if I go with you to Arizona. They'll both be interested in financial operations this summer. And when you're done I can go home with you."

"Good!" Emily said.

Mary Ellen shook her head. "I won't stand for this," she said. "If Lenny comes into this house, I'm leaving!"

"You're not going anywhere," Lenny said, "or do anything except graduate from dear old John Tyler High. After that, you and I and your parents are going to take a long trip to a place called Lyrane. And when the people there get through with us, we'll be adults. And maybe then I won't look so much like a louse to you, and you won't look so much like a witch to me."

"Mom!—do something!"

Emily shrugged. Her pleasant face wore a tight Giaconda smile, half loving, half cruel. Looking at her, Jones wondered if the Mona Lisa had been a Lyranian. It was hardly possible, but there was more than a passing resemblance. "Dear," Emily said, "I can't do a thing about it. You'll simply have to grow up and become decently inhuman."

—J.F. BONE

Catalus (cont. from page 88)

"Where could I go?" Westman asked. "What higher ambition could I have? Should I conquer a World? A stargroup? Would that be greater than controlling—even covertly—the entire Ten Thousand Worlds?"

"And I can guarantee that you

would have all the opportunity for conniving and manipulation you could possibly ask," Frank allowed.

The end was no longer in doubt.

I rose unobtrusively. I hoped Genevieve would still be waiting.

—CHARLES V. DE VET

Jim Roszell tells us his previous credits include "Love Machines, Inc." (Rivercity Review, Oct., 1971), "The Plug Kicker" (Rivercity Review, July, 1972) and "The Iceman" (Worlds of If, April, 1974). Here he tells the tale of a frustrating war upon an alien—

FRONTIER

JIM ROSZELL

Illustrated by Rick Bryant

COLONEL LEE MCALLISTER stood ankle deep in oozing, black mud. It made throaty, sucking noises as he paced slowly back and forth before his command post. Rain drummed gently, but incessantly, on his gold, sol-blazened white helmet. Water ran down the smooth, lustrous white surface, dripped from the edge of the bill and fell in a never ending stream before his cold, gray eyes.

McAllister was short with wide, powerful shoulders and chest. He wore the gold and white uniform of the Marines, but the tight white pants and gold and white tunic were splattered with black mud. His face was oval with few harsh lines. A black zapata mustache flecked with gray told that he was forty instead of twenty, but his eyes were what commanded the men. Few could look rebelliously into the cold grayness.

Keton's sun rose in the east. No pink and orange glory blazed in the sky. There was only a gradual lightening of the grayness, the same steel grayness that had hung over the camp for four months. It was always gray on the northern frontier of Keton.

McAllister blew out a long sigh. The moisture from his breath condensed and then was driven away in the rain. He

walked with slow, sucking steps to a small igloo-tent next to his command post. Breaking the seal, he reached in and tweaked Corporal Mulvany's toe.

The young girl jerked erect and rubbed the sleep from her blue eyes like a small child roused in the night. She saw McAllister and quickly got into her uniform. Mulvany crawled from the igloo and stood up in the rain and mud.

"Good morning, sir," she said with a sleep crusted voice.

McAllister looked at the thin frame and soft, round face of his eighteen year old aide. Mulvany reminded him of his own daughter. "Good morning, Mulvany. Sound reveille."

"Yes, sir," Mulvany said reaching into her tent for the bugle. "Sir?"

"Yes."

"Have you heard from Mister Kun-nell?"

"No, I haven't."

"Are we going to get out, sir?" Mulvany asked. McAllister couldn't tell if it were tears or rain on the girl's face.

"Sure, we'll make it. Sound the call."

The harsh brassy instrument rolled its strain out over the camp as it had over human military camps for a thousand years. Lights came on in igloos as the men and women dragged themselves

from the warm dryness of their beds, donned their uniforms and stepped into the cold rain of the Keton morning. Complaining, yawning and scratching, they fell in for formation and roll call.

"Mulvany, get your chow. When you come back, see if you can raise Kunnell," McAllister said. Mulvany turned to go then stopped.

"Can I bring you something back, sir?" she asked.

"Maybe a cup of Stim and a roll," McAllister said.

The young girl slogged off through the mud, and McAllister stared north into the mountains. The central pass rose into the foothills and was then obscured by clouds. He knew it ran like a wide corridor through the formidable mountains. It was the only passage on the continent large enough for an army to move through. It had to be held, or the farmers on the central and southern plains would be at the mercy of the Keton barbarians.

The barbarians were passionate fighters. Hoards of warriors overloaded sentinel fields by sheer numbers, and the tranquilizer darts McAllister's people used had no stopping power. The Ketes dragged off their wounded; they slept off the tranquilizer, and two days later, they were back in the army. It was like an impotent mouse trying to rape a tiger.

Mulvany returned with the hot Stim and roll. McAllister ate the rain soaked roll without tasting it, but the hot, black Stim surged through him making him feel awake if not optimistic.

"I have Mister Kunnell on the phone, sir," Mulvany called from the command tent.

McAllister stepped into the big, plastic igloo and took the phone from Mulvany. "Hello, Cliff, this is Lee McAllister," McAllister said more cheerfully than he felt. ♂



"How's it going out there, Lee?" Kunnell said. His voice was guarded even though muffled and distorted by the phone.

"Has anything come through on my request for naval laser-fire?" McAllister asked not spending time on amenities.

"The Admiralty turned it down. They say weather conditions are too bad for orbital fire," the thin, tinny voice said.

"Come on, Cliff. You know that's a bunch of crap. We can direct the fire from down here," McAllister said turning his back on Mulvany and lowering his voice.

"That's what they said, Lee."

"How about using steel ball in the weapons instead of tranquilizers?"

"Lee, why are you doing this to me? You know the Central Committee won't allow the Navy to kill natives. It just isn't done. The court decisions after the Centauri four massacre settled that for all time."

"Why in the hell doesn't the Central Committee get their butts out here and tell these Kete's we're not supposed to kill each other," McAllister said. His temper rose fast, and he knew he'd better check it. Kunnell was the closest thing to a friend he had at State Department Headquarters.

"Don't jump me, Lee. I just relay messages," Kunnell said coolly.

"Sure, Cliff. I know, but I lost fifty men yesterday, and the Ketes are getting weapons somewhere. Four of the ones we captured were carrying service carbines loaded with steel ball. It was bad enough with bows and arrows, but if they get automatic weapons, you're going to have a blood bath on the central plains."

"They're probably weapons taken off your men, Lee," Kunnell said. His voice was mildly alarmed. He didn't like talk about the breakdown of the northern frontier.

"All our weapons are loaded with tranquilizer. My people don't even carry steel ball. They came from somewhere else. See if you can get permission for a raid on the Kete's camp. Maybe I can find out where the guns are coming from. Besides, you can't expect us to win fighting pure defense. Sooner or later we'll make a mistake."

"Okay, Lee. I'll put it through, but don't expect too much. You're not exactly the fair-haired-boy around here," Kunnell said.

"I know, but we've got to have some relief. Another raid like yesterday, and we'll need more than just replacements. Morale is low."

"That's your problem, Lee, but I'll see what I can do on this end. Keep me posted. Goodbye, Lee."

"Sure, Cliff. Goodbye." The line clicked dead, and McAllister dropped the phone into its carriage. He stepped outside into the rain and brooded quietly. The phone rang inside, but McAllister didn't stir.

Mulvany came to the door, "Sir, Able company reports first row sentinels have stopped transmitting. It looks like another attack."

"Okay. Call the company commanders. Get them up here, on the double."

Six Captains, a Major and a Lieutenant assembled in the command tent. McAllister paced back and forth before them as he spoke. "You know we lost Captain Harris in yesterday's raid. We'll all miss him. Lieutenant Amy Parker is now in command of Easy company. Our forward sentinels have stopped transmitting. Right now, we don't know if it's another attack, or this crummy rain getting into the electronics. We'll treat it like a raid. Move your people up to the perimeter in thirty minutes. Captain Allen, take four squads and set up two good pill boxes in the low hills on our

right flank. That way we'll have them in a crossfire. Captain Wade, you do the same thing on the left flank. Any questions?"

Lieutenant Parker raised her hand selfconsciously then stood. McAllister knew the Lieutenant was scared. "Sir, what charges are we to use? The rumor is we can use lethals."

"We wish. Brigade, Regiment, Division, Corps, the Admiralty and the Central Committee have all vetoed lethals. I'm sorry. If there are no other questions, you are dismissed. Captain Steel, will you stay, please."

The company commanders filed out grumbling among themselves. McAllister didn't blame them. The people in his Brigade were pros, and they were being asked to die stupidly.

Jed Steel was forty-five and graying. He was tall with cat-like sinewiness. His face was hard and unsmiling and wreathed in a mane of shining black hair. He had done four hitches with commandoes and had been passed over twice for promotion because of it. Commandoes weren't trusted by the Admiralty.

"You got a problem, Lee?" Jed asked sitting on the edge of the chart table.

"Yes, and you're going to get me out of it," McAllister said.

"Shoot."

"I want you to take half your company into the mountains and wait. Draw steel ball and enough explosive charges to lay down a good barrage." McAllister moved to the chart showing the mountain range, the central pass and their position. "You can't go up the pass, or you'll be seen. Go over the mountains, and set up a cold camp here," McAllister said pointing to a low range of hills on the northern slope of the mountains. "Locate their main camp, then lay low."

"Now you're talking, Lee," Jed said. his eyes sparkling.

"If you're discovered before you make your position, turn back. Maintain radio silence until you're set. You should make camp by dark. We'll be listening tonight at 2300. Give us a brief transmission to let us know you're in position."

"They're getting carbines somewhere, and I want to know where. So far all they've used is steel ball, but if they get explosives, we've had it. That's all, and good luck."

"It's a piece of cake, Lee. And thanks for picking me," Jed said leaving the tent.

Mulvany turned from her monitor board at the back of the tent and said, "Sir, Able company reports number two sentinels are not transmitting."

"Thanks, Mulvany," McAllister said studying the map of the mountains and checking off the enemy's position in his mind. They were moving fast, faster than they should be.

"Sir," Mulvany said. "Captain Allen reports her guns are in position, and they are fortifying."

McAllister marked Maggie Allen's position on the map, then drew up a tubular camp chair and sat down in the doorway of the tent. He looked up at the wide central pass. It was a kilometer wide and looked blue-green due to the lush growth of moss covering its floor. Steep cliffs rose from either side of the pass and disappeared into the clouds.

Shortly after the Ketons crossed the third row sentinels, McAllister would be able to see them boiling down the pass out of the clouds. It was an apocalyptic vision. Two hundred thousand pink-skinned, gaudily dressed natives came rolling and seething down the slope. Thank God for the fifth row sentinels with force screens. At least they broke the momentum of the charge, and the first natives who pressed through the field were groggy

and dazed.

"Mulvany, after this is over, check with the quarter master and get enough sentinels to set up three more rows with fields," McAllister said still staring off to the north.

"Yes, sir. The number three sentinels are not transmitting."

"Well, it won't be long now. Where's my rifle and field phone?"

"Right here, sir," Mulvany said pulling the light weapon and a small leather pouch from behind the monitor board.

"I'm going down to Charley Company. Keep me posted," McAllister said clipping the pouch to his belt and slinging the rifle over his arm.

McAllister stepped from the flooring of the command tent into the cold mud. The rain had slackened, and he struck off with the broad-stanced, mudder's gate all of his people had adopted.

His rifle bumped rhythmically against his hip. It was a product of the best human technology. It weighed a kilogram and a half, and it was an air gun. It fired five millimeter projectiles at 1200 meters a second and three hundred rounds a minute. The rifle fired several different charges, the tranquilizer, the solid steel ball, a low explosive charge and a high explosive charge. A single man loaded with high explosive charges could destroy a small city.

Charley company was the center of the line. Because of the geometry of McAllister's defenses, they bore the heaviest part of the attack. All other defenses were designed to fire for support of Charley company.

Major John Lang, commander of Charley company, was a tall, heavy man with a ruddy complexion. His hair was sandy color, always flying in every direction at once. Lang's eyes were watery brown and close-set. His mouth was broad and heavy and always held the well-chewed stump of a black cigar.

Lang did everything hard, he lived hard, played hard and fought hard. He was the mainstay of McAllister's defense.

As McAllister approached, Lang was shouting orders to a squad of his people erecting deflector plates in front of the trenches. "Brace those son of a bitching plates good! I could knock them down with a good stream of pee," Lang shouted. His cigar moved frantically from one side of his mouth to the other.

"How is it going, John?" McAllister said stopping behind Lang.

"Hey, Lee. What are you doing down here?" Lang asked.

"Just taking a look around. I've got an idea to set up two double rows of sentinels across the pass. The first row will stop their charge, and the second will contain the ones that get through the first row. Then we'll set up two rows behind them to bottle them up. It'll take some of the pressure off you here," McAllister said trying to justify his presence.

"Sounds good if it'll work," Lang said, eyeing McAllister with squinted eyes.

"It will work," McAllister said absently. He watched the flurry of activity as men and women tended the defenses. It relaxed him to be in the battle preparations.

"Have you heard anymore about changing loads?" John asked trying to keep the conversation going.

"No, nothing new."

"I thought there might have been a change in orders. Somebody said Steel's people drew ball and H.E.'s," Lang said putting his hands on his hips and digging a toe in the mud.

"He's going on patrol. He won't be back for awhile, and if we get orders to change, I want to make sure he's got them with him," McAllister said still sucking in the tension and turmoil of the people. It breathed new life and pur-

pose into him.

"Is Maggie okay where she is?" Lang asked.

"She'll be all right, John. She's a sharp soldier. Get back to your people. I'll just wander around awhile."

"Sure, Lee." Lang turned and was instantly involved in a squabble about a gun emplacement.

McAllister remembered when he'd been a company commander. He remembered how it felt to ready for battle. Outguessing the enemy, bolstering his people, getting the best positions he could find. Every nerve was concentrated on the job. Every ounce of energy was devoted to the coming fight.

Now it was different. He dealt with Kunnell and others like him. He was as heavily embroiled with politics as with the war. Even now, with a battle pending, his attention was split, and nagging doubts that he'd forgotten something vital to the survival of his people plagued him.

McAllister looked to the north, but he didn't see the hordes of Ketons coming. They'd crossed the third sentinel. They should have been in sight by now.

He pulled the field phone from his belt and pressed the talk switch. "Mulvany, what's the progress of the Ketons?"

"They've stopped somewhere in the high pass, sir. Captain Allen says they aren't visible from her position," Mulvany said. Her voice was thin and metallic in the field phone.

Maggie Allen was three hundred meters south of the fourth line of sentinels. It wasn't like the Ketons to stop. They worked themselves into fighting frenzies then charged until they encountered the enemy. According to Intelligence, a sufficiently

motivated Keton could run full speed for thirty kilometers and still be ready to fight.

"Any orders, sir?" Mulvany asked.

"No, not yet. I'm on my way back," McAllister said. He turned off the field phone and slogged through the mud back to H.Q.

As he stepped through the doorway, Mulvany said, "Still no progress, sir."

McAllister hung his rifle, phone and helmet on the pegs at the door and realized his uniform was soaked with water and mud. He walked through the tent and stepped into the rear compartment.

His quarters were four meters square and were luxurious. There was a tubular bed, a closet, a tubular webbed chair and a table.

McAllister broke the seals and shucked off the uniform and boots. He toweled himself dry and put on a clean, dry uniform, setting the seals as he stepped back into the main tent.

"No reports, sir," Mulvany said.

"What about Wade? Is he in position yet?" McAllister asked buckling on his utility belt.

"I haven't heard, sir. Shall I try to raise him?" Mulvany asked. She sat at the console listening intently. McAllister had a flashing vision of his daughter, and it almost brought tears to his eyes as the neat grave on Centauri four also flashed through his mind.

"Yes."

She turned intently to her radio, and McAllister looked over his map.

"I can't raise him, sir," Mulvany said turning around to face him.

"Get me Captain Thrasher in Fox company."

Mulvany turned and in a second turned back. "She's on the line, sir."

McAllister pressed the stud on his table phone. "Linda," he said. "Have you seen anything of Wade?"

"No, Lee," Linda's voice came back. "He pulled out just after the briefing."

"We can't raise him on the phone. Send out a patrol to his position and see what's up. Have your people stand at ease. The Ketes have stopped somewhere between number three and four sentinels."

"Right, Lee. We'll get right back to you," she said. The line clicked dead.

"Call the rest of the company commanders and have them stand at ease but remain at their posts."

"Yes, sir," Mulvany said.

McAllister sat anxiously waiting for the phone to buzz. Something was wrong with this attack.

The field phone buzzed and Mulvany motioned for him to pick up. He pressed the stud and said, "McAllister."

"Lee, Wade has been wiped out," Linda Thrasher said. Her voice was thick with anger. "They were cut to pieces, and there are some tracks that look like troop carriers. It must have been over very quickly. They're still assembled in a column of twos."

"Okay. Get two platoons out there to set up that pill box. Take over the rest of George company," McAllister said.

"Lee, where the hell did they get troop carriers?" she asked.

"The same damn place they got those service carbines. On the double, Captain." He flicked off the switch. "Get through to Captain Allen and tell her about Wade. Tell her to be alert. Then get Kunnell."

Mulvany talked hurriedly into her phone then turned to McAllister, "Sir, Mister Kunnell is on the phone, and the quarter master says they have

enough sentinels for one row with fields."

"Tell the quarter master to take a squad and set up the sentinels twenty meters in front of the fifth row fields," McAllister said walking to his desk and depressing the phone stud. "Hello, Cliff?"

"Hi, Lee. How's it going?"

"Not too well. I lost half a company this morning."

"It must have been a big attack," Cliff said flatly.

McAllister sat down in his chair and looked hard at the phone as if he could drill Kunnell through the wire. "That's what I called you about. It wasn't a regular attack. It was a guerilla operation."

"The Ketons have never done anything like that before."

"I know. They also had troop carriers, and I damn well want to know where they got them," McAllister said feeling the heat rise in his neck and spread over his face in a hot flush.

"I'll check it out, Lee. The only humans known to be with the Ketons are some missionaries."

"Yeah, well the Ketes are getting a hell of a lot more than Bibles. I need some more sentinels with fields. I'm setting up a trap, and I don't have enough. Can you get on Regiment and have them down here this afternoon?" McAllister said feeling let down at Kunnell's easy-taking of the news of the Kete's armament.

"I'll try. Are you planning something I shouldn't know about?" Kunnell asked.

"If I was, you really wouldn't want me to tell you, would you?"

"No, I guess not. Don't get in too deep, Lee. I know you're in a tough, lousy position, but there are a lot of eyes watching you, and you won't be on that frontier forever. You've got a

career to think of."

"Cliff, if it comes to a choice between breaking the rules and losing my people, I'll break the damn rules," McAllister said hotly.

"I'll forget I heard that, Lee. I'll see what I can do on this end. Keep me posted."

"Sure, Cliff. Goodbye." McAllister pressed the cut off and swore under his breath. Why couldn't he get some decent intelligence? The Navy vessel, Omar Bradley, cruising thirty thousand kilometers above the surface of Keton had infrared scanners that could penetrate the cloud cover and pick up a pimple on a backside. So why in the hell couldn't they see troop carriers and the ships delivering them?

"Sir?"

"Yes, Mulvany."

"Are you. . . . Are you in trouble? With Regimental headquarters, I mean."

"I suppose so, but that's nothing new," McAllister said scanning the map as if he could see the Kete troops moving beyond the frontier.

"Sir?"

"Yes, Mulvany."

"May I come to your tent tonight? I know you haven't had any visitors since we've been up here. I mean, with my tent right next to yours. . . . I mean, sir, I would love to. I mean. . . ."

McAllister stopped fiddling with the map and looked at Mulvany with blank eyes. She was a fine soldier, and a sweet girl. She was trying to ease her commander's burden. "Not tonight, Mulvany, but perhaps we could have some dinner. Around 2000."

She relaxed visibly, but some of the light left her face. Gathering herself together and smothering her disap-

pointment, she said, "I'd love to have dinner with you, sir."

The day was busy, but there were no further attacks. McAllister had his people stand down from battle stations just before the noon meal. After lunch he sent out patrols to scout the pass. The enemy had gone. The sentinels were reset, and everyone was back in camp by 1500 hours.

The quarter master from Regiment called and said they didn't have enough sentinels with fields to spare. They would have to be dropped from the Omar Bradley, and it would be sometime next week before they could be delivered. McAllister wasn't pleased and told the quarter master so. Lee knew that with only two rows of fields boxing in the Ketes, they would get away, at least a lot of them would. If they came in troop carriers, it would take at least four rows of fields to stop them.

At 1700 hours, McAllister called the cook tent and ordered a special dinner sent to the command tent at 2000. Sargeant Hensen, chief cook, would tend to it personally, and McAllister knew it would be good.

Mulvany excused herself at 1800 and turned the watch over to the Officer of the Day. McAllister took a last look at the map outlining their position, sighed and rolled it up to make room for the dinner. He signed out to the O.D. and showered, depilatoried his face and put on his dress uniform. Then checking himself in the mirror, he decided the glitter and gold were too much. It would inhibit her, and while he had no plans for the night, he didn't want Mulvany to feel selfconscious. McAllister substituted plain battle fatigues unadorned with ribbons or symbols of rank.

Mulvany arrived at 2000 hours

sharp. She wore a blue gossamer evening dress that hinted at the curves and shadows of her trim, firm body. Her hair was down and circled her face in a glimmering, ebony cloud. She had used just the right touch of makeup, and her lips looked full and healthily red. Her eyes were lined with a soft, misty blue sheen and accentuated with black eyelashes and eyebrows. She looked like a furry, cuddly kitten.

"I'm here, sir," she said softly. Her voice was cool and mellow. The tough, efficient Mulvany who manned his Com. Center was gone in a puff of perfume and a cool blue cloud.

"Indeed you are, Mulvany. Please come in. Dinner should be here shortly. Would you care for some wine? I have a bottle stashed in the back."

McAllister went to his quarters and dug the wine from his closet. He had carried the bottle for a long time, since the Morovian campaign six years earlier. The golden liquid was rich and warming, and McAllister rationed himself, saving it for times when he was depressed.

McAllister left his quarters and found two glasses. "We should have crystal for this. It's Morovian Gold. Have you ever had any?"

"No, sir, but I've heard about it," she said taking the seat across from him.

"I bought four bottles after the Morovian campaign was over. It cost me half a month's pay, but it's worth it," he said pouring ten cc's into each glass. "Warm it with your hands before you drink."

"Yes, sir."

"Would you drop the 'sir' for tonight and call me Lee?"

"Yes, sir. I mean, Lee," she said touching the thick, golden liquid to

her lips. McAllister did the same feeling the rich, lustrous warmth flow through him. "Something that tastes this good must be sinful," she said lowering her glass. "Will you call me Trina, just for tonight?"

"Of course, Trina," McAllister said frantically searching for something to say. The glow as spreading rapidly to his head, his vision sharpened, and Trina sat in the middle of a warm golden glow.

The dinner came and broke the awkward silence. Hensen had outdone himself. There were Centaurian eggs for appetizers. The tiny, bite-sized eggs had a tangy taste like clove and mild horseradish and a high alcohol content. The main course was a succulent shell fish from the Keton seas that had been cooked in butter with onion and garlic. The vegetables were a cactus from the Keton desert, blanched in hot water and served with a mushroom-like fungus in wine sauce. Desert was a Syrian Mango that had a rich peachy-melon taste. McAllister poured more Morovian Gold, and they sat once again in silence over the ruins of the meal.

McAllister took a large sip from the glass and stood up. He paced across the tent, feeling nervous despite the wine. "I'm sorry, I don't have much to say. I don't want to talk shop, and I've never been good at small talk."

"Then, don't talk," she said. Trina's voice was rich and warm and flowed around him like a fluid. She rose from the table and walked over to him. Reaching up, she drew his face down and kissed him gently on the lips then buried his face against the warm cloud of her hair. She wore a light perfume that penetrated his skull. "Come," she said leading him to his quarters.

THEY LAY WARMLY under the covers. Lee's arm was around her shoulder, and her head rested lightly on his chest. Her smooth, soft body pressed gently against him, and her breathing was quiet and shallow as it rippled the hair on his chest. He listened to the sounds of the men clearing the dinner dishes and the sound of the eternal Keton rain beating against the plastic tent roof.

"Lee?"

"Mmm?"

"Are you asleep?"

"No."

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

"Why are we here? What are we doing in this God-foresaken place?" she asked softly without stirring.

"I . . . I don't know," he said gently hugging her closer to him.

She was quiet, and they both listened to the rain pock-pocking against the tent. "Are we going to get out?" she asked in her quiet, warm voice.

He breathed deeply, wanting to push away the question, to just lie there with her against him and listen to the rain. "I don't know that either."

"Will you go against the Central Committee and the State Department?"

"Yes, I will."

"Don't you think we should pack up and leave this place to the natives?"

He lay for a long time, and she raised up to see if he were still awake. "It doesn't matter what I think," he said.

The phone beeped angrily at them from the outer room, and McAllister threw his legs off the side of the bed and reached for his robe. Stepping through the portal, he keyed the switch and said, "McAllister."

"Sorry to disturb you, sir, but we're receiving a transmission from Captain Steel. He says he must talk to you."

"Put him through." McAllister waited through a series of clicks on the line as they were connected.

"Lee? This is Jed. I'm in position, and I've got something to report."

"Go ahead."

"This place is like a fort. They've got fields up all over the place and troop carriers and tanks."

"What about ships? Who's delivering the stuff?" McAllister asked.

"You're not going to like it, Lee. The drop ships are from the Omar Bradley."

"What?"

"That's right. There are Navy and Marine personnel all over the place. I don't know what the hell is going on, but it looks like one hell of a screw job." Steel's voice was flat and tired.

"Yeah. Sit tight, Jed. Load up for a barrage while I check out a few things on this end. I'm going to find out what the hell is going on."

"Okay, Lee. We'll wait to hear from you unless we're attacked."

"Right," McAllister said thumbing down the cut off. He turned his back on the phone and paced back and forth across the room. Trina leaned against the door-facing to his quarters. Her skin was soft and golden in the yellow light. "You'd better get your uniform on, Trina. We've got some work to do."

"Yes, sir," she said gathering her dress and shoes from his quarters. Within five minutes, she was in uniform and seated at the phone. "I'm ready, sir. Do you want Mister Kun-nell?"

"You're damn right I do, Mulvany," McAllister said going to his quarters and pulling on his battle dress. He was zipping the seals as Mulvany

called out to him.

"Mister Kunnell is on the line, sir."

McAllister took in a deep breath to get rid of the anger in him. "Hello, Cliff."

"Yes, Lee," Kunnell said. His voice was thick with either sleep or booze.

"Have you turned up anything on those arms?"

"You got me out of bed to ask that?" Kunnell asked. Anger rose in his voice.

"I have something on this end. I sent out a patrol to scout the Kete's camp. The ships delivering the guns are from the Omar Bradley, and there are Marine and Navy personnel in the camp," Lee said fighting to keep his voice even.

There was a long silence on the phone. "Are you still there, Cliff?"

"Yeah, Lee. I'm here. Did you have authorization to send out that patrol?" Kunnell asked evenly.

"What the hell kind of a question is that? I don't need authorization to send out a scouting party. It falls under command prerogative for maintenance of intelligence on enemy positions," McAllister said hotly.

"Sorry, it's just that I don't want any crap coming back on me about covert and clandestine operations," Kunnell said flatly.

"Come off it, Cliff," McAllister said calming himself.

"You know some of our conversations haven't been very reassuring. I don't like to hear you talking about breaking Central Committee directives."

"I'm not that desperate yet. But you damn well better find out what is going on here, or I'm going to clean out that camp—including the Marine and Navy people," McAllister said coldly.

"I'll get a hold of a friend of mine

in Internal Affairs at the Admiralty. If anybody knows anything, it'll be him."

"You'd better do it fast, Cliff. I'm not set up to hold out against what they can throw at us. If they've got Marine advisors, they can locate and knock out our fields, and they're the only things that have kept us alive," McAllister said with a sinking feeling. Kunnell always knew somebody somewhere that had all the dope on everything, but somehow nothing ever materialized.

"I'll get back to you within the hour."

"You've got an hour, Cliff. If I don't hear from you by 0100, I hit the Kete camp."

"Lee, you're putting a lot of pressure on me."

"Believe me, Cliff. It's nothing like the pressure I feel."

The line went dead, and McAllister leaned back in his chair. He slumped down and stretched his arms over his head. The wine and the long day were getting to him. Fatigue tugged heavily at him and made his mind slow and his eyes heavy.

He looked over at Mulvany. She was also fatigued. "Trina, get some sleep. We're going to have a hard day tomorrow, and I want you sharp."

"What about the board? I have to answer the calls," she said.

"I can get them. Set up the tape machine to record everything that comes in, then get out of here. If I need you, I'll call you."

She made some adjustments to her board, then left the tent.

Lee opened the drawer of his table and pulled out a sheet of memo paper. He wrote in his large open scrawl:

TO: Clifford Kunnell, Assistant Secretary of State, Keton

FROM: Colonel Lee McAllister,
CMDR. Frontier Garrison, Keton

RE: Corporal Trina Mulvany

Dear Cliff:

If you read this then you will know we have been wiped out. Corporal Mulvany, who bears this note, is my aide, and she has pertinent testimony for the board of inquiry which will investigate the loss of my command. She has either heard or has tapes of all conversations between myself and the company commanders in my battalion, as well as our conversations. She can, therefore, give first person evidence.

When this is all over, I'd appreciate it if you would use your influence to get Corporal Mulvany into Officer Training School. She is a good soldier, and she will make a fine officer.

Yours, *Lee*

McAllister folded the memo and sealed it in an envelope and scrawled Kunnell's name across the front. He took another sheet of paper from the desk and wrote across the top: Dear Sara: This is one of those too infrequent letters from your loving husband.

The phone beeped at him rudely.

"McAllister."

"Jed Steel, Lee. We're under attack from the camp. The Kete's must have located our position from the radio transmission, and they're throwing everything they've got at us."

"Use your H.E.'s and lethal charges. Get the hell back here as fast as you can," McAllister said.

"Negative, Lee. We're surrounded, and they've got some heavy stuff." Steel's voice was calm and cold. "I thought you'd want to know."

"Right, Jed. I'm sorry it worked out this way. Take as many of them with you as you can," McAllister said quietly.

"You bet. I'm going to personally level that god damned camp. Goodbye, Lee."

"Bye, Jed." McAllister sighed and picked up the pen and finished the letter to his wife. He addressed the envelope, sealed it and placed it next to the one for Kunnell.

The phone beeped, and McAllister pressed the button on his desk phone, "McAllister."

"Lee, this is Cliff. I talked to my friend at Internal Affairs. I've got some word on what's happening, so you can call back your patrol," Kunnell said. His voice was tight with urgency.

"It's too late," McAllister said. "They've been attacked and are surrounded by the Kete's. Jed Steel doesn't think they can make it back."

"That's too bad," Kunnell said lowering his voice.

"Yeah, Steel was a good man. What have you got on this situation?"

There was a long pause, then Kunnell said, "There's a big investigation going on about the handling of the Keton situation. There are at least three Admirals involved and several Marine officers at Division. The plan was for the Ketes to wipe out the human population, then an expeditionary force would wipe out the Ketes leaving the planet uninhabited. The planet then belongs to the expeditionary force by right of conquest, and the Admirals are securing the officer's and enlisted personnel's shares of the planet for very modest sums. When it was all over with, they'd own the whole planet of Keton."

"Why would they want it? It's a damn poor place to pick for retirement," McAllister said.

"There are large deposits of Tellurium here. Also several other elements are in abundance that are

trace minerals most other places. Tellurium crystals are the basis of the warp drive used on every Navy and commercial ship we have. It's worth millions."

"Well, it's consoling to know we're not being screwed over for a few piece of farmland."

"Bitterness from you, Lee?" Kunnell's voice was incredulous.

"Not really. Just a little cynicism."

"Lee, off the record, hold out any way you can. Do whatever you have to do," Kunnell said in a conspiratorial tone.

"I'd already decided to do just that. Thanks for the story." He pressed the button breaking the connection.

McAllister stood and stepped through the door into the cold night. His feet sank into the black ooze, and the cold rain rattled against his bare head and washed down over his face taking with it the fatigue that consumed him. He paced slowly back and forth before his tent listening to the sucking noises his boots made in the mud. The rain splattered into the mud and threw small flecks of black onto the whiteness of his battle dress.

Mulvany crawled from her small tent and came over to him. "Is there anything I can do, sir? I heard you walking around and thought maybe. . . . I mean."

"Did you get any rest?" McAllister asked. She looked very little and lonely in the dim light cast by the open door of his tent.

"No."

"We might as well not be the only ones awake. Call the company commanders and tell them to draw high explosive and steel ball rounds for all their people and the outpost pill boxes. When that's done, I have a special job for you." McAllister said turning toward the black mountains

that rose into the black sky.

Mulvany went inside and started making the calls. McAllister looked at the blackness for a few more minutes then went into the tent.

Mulvany came over to him and said, "What is the special job you have for me?"

McAllister picked up the two letters and handed them to her. "I want you to take these to Capital City. Mail the one to my wife and deliver the other one to Kunnell."

"But you could send them with the mail service in the morning," Mulvany protested.

"We may not be here for the mail service in the morning. Besides, I want that one to Kunnell delivered into his hands personally," McAllister said sitting down at his table.

"If the battalion goes under, I want to be here. You have no right to send me away," Mulvany said as tears welled up in her black eyes.

"I have every right, Corporal. Besides, your mission may not be as easy as you think. Thirty minutes after I told Kunnell I had a patrol near the Kete camp, Jed Steel was attacked and wiped out," McAllister said hotly.

"You think Mister Kunnell told the Ketes?"

"I don't know for sure, but you're going to find out. If he doesn't kill you first, you are going to tell everything you know about this mess to the board of inquiry. Now, pack up your phone tapes and put them in my flyer. When the first sentinels trip, you take off and circle the camp until you see what happens. If we hold them, come down. If they overrun us, head for Capital City. Now, get to work," McAllister said turning to look out the door. The sky was graying in the east. It wouldn't be long.

McAllister listened but didn't watch Trina pack the neatly labeled phone tapes. She carried them to the flyer, then returned to her tent for her personal belongings. She emerged from her tent in dress uniform. She came in and sat down next to McAllister.

"I'll meet you at the Regent's Hotel in Capitol City, Lee," she said quietly and calmly.

"Sure, Trina. As soon as we're replaced," McAllister said flatly.

A buzzer clammered harshly from her board. The alarm light flashed urgently. The third row sentinels had been tripped.

"Sound the general alarm, then get the hell out of here."

McAllister stepped into the rain and looked up at the high pass. Thousands of brightly dressed Ketes swarmed down the pass. Hundreds of troop carriers and tanks ran among them. The great sea of natives rippled and flowed like a huge wave of water pouring down the pass.

"Number four sentinels tripped, sir," Mulvany said from inside.

"Mulvany, git the hell out of here!" McAllister shouted.

Maggie Allen's outpost guns opened up, and giant holes ripped in the gaudily colored wave as the H.E.'s went off in their midst. As the wave neared the fifth row of sentinels, the rest of the battalion opened fire. The front of the wave stopped and pulled

back. The tanks came forward and opened up with their H.E.'s. An alarm sounded in the tent as the fifth row sentinels were blown out of the ground. The tanks rolled on carving great exploding holes in McAllister's lines. Smoke from the explosions, mud and pieces of bodies filled the air. Fighting was hand to hand many places along the line. Still the wave of Ketes came down the pass.

A chill ran through McAllister. He went into the tent for his rifle. As he emerged, two Ketes charged him. He sprayed them. They went down. Two more came from the left. His shots were a fraction of a second too late.

As they fell, McAllister felt a hot, heavy pressure on his chest. Blood sucked in the wound as he breathed. A red spot grew rapidly on his white uniform. There was a lot of blood.

Fatigue tugged at him, and he sat down in the mud. Rain drummed heavily on his head. Coldness crept into his arms and legs.

Another Kete came at him and fired. The Kete's bullet caught him high in the chest slamming him backward into the mud. He stared into the gray sky. Rain fell coldly into his eyes, mixed with tears and flowed down his cheeks. As blackness closed around him, he saw the tiny arrowhead ship bank steeply to the left and set course for Capital City.

—JIM ROSZELL

ON SALE IN NOVEMBER AMAZING

THE MESSA IS A LONELY PLACE TO DREAM AND SCREAM AND DREAM by GRANIA DAVIS, A SENSE OF DISASTER by CHRISTOPHER ANVIL, THE HAIRY PARENTS by A. BERTRAM CHANDLER, LEASHOLD by WALLACE WEST, DEATH ETERNAL by RAYMOND F. JONES, DEMON AND DEMOISELLE by JANET FOX, PRIDEY GOETH by DAVID R. BUNCH, A MALADY OF MAGICKS by CRAIG-SHAW GARDNER.

(Continued from page 24)

ence the real thing (always assuming there is a "real thing"). But *Close Encounters* only asks the same, obvious questions; it supplies no valid answers.

I enjoyed the visual thrills in *Close Encounters*, but I left the theatre resenting the obvious way in which the movie attempted to manipulate me. When I considered this for a moment I realized that my feeling was identical to that which I'd experienced after seeing *Jaws*.

Then I began considering the parallels between *Close Encounters* and *Jaws*. They are many and obvious. The movies share a director (Spielberg), a star (Dreyfuss) and soundtrack composer (Williams). More than that, they share a common template. If you took each movie and graphed out the plotting and pacing—from slow-tease opening to comedy-relief anticlimax one-third of the way in, to the concluding half-hour or so in which all the real meat of each movie lies—and laid these graphs over each other, they would be all but identical. To me this implies a mechanical skeleton over which each movie was draped: a contrived skeleton designed to manipulate the audience. For just as a shark's fin in *Jaws* was revealed to be a hoax after frightening hundreds of people, the approach of the "UFOs" at one point in *Close Encounters* turns out to be only helicopters. In each case I thought it was a dangerous maneuver: if the audience considered the point, they might realize that the "real" shark in *Jaws* was equally manmade and unbelievable and the lights on the approaching helicopters so exactly resembled those of the earlier-seen UFOs that I wondered if Spielberg was mockingly giving his technical-effects secrets away.

The characters in both movies are composed of solid, believable plywood of the quarter-inch-thick variety. They act out stereotypical attitudes with a

two-dimensional fidelity that I never for one moment found believable or identified with. Dreyfuss' scene in *Close Encounters* in which he pitches dirt, shrubs and construction materials into his house through a small high window in order to build a mock-up of a mountain in his livingroom had the audience laughing in derision. I wondered why we were being insulted with this sort of foolishness.

Equally, I wondered why the three-year-old's toys all came to life and organized themselves as if directed by sentence—there appeared to be no connection between this event and the subsequent behavior of the aliens. It wasn't until the movie was over and I had time to consider the point that I realized that scene was there purely to mystify and intrigue the audience—that there was no other connection at all.

I might have accepted this as a minor price to be paid for Douglas Trumbel's marvelous special effects; especially those of the final scene, had it not been for Spielberg's appallingly pedestrian direction which alternately pulled at the movie and halted it in fits and jerks. *Jaws* shared that quality of pedestrian direction, but was less crippled by it because Spielberg was working with a stronger storyline. *Close Encounters* has damned little storyline in most respects: it is a collection of scenes assembled in nearly random order to prepare us for the ultimate scene. Most of these penultimate scenes are directed like stock footage, the sort of work any competent director without any point of view of his own might do. Like most such work, these scenes don't call attention to themselves (a point in their favor), but I was jolted by Spielberg's cliché shots of the two protagonists (if that's what they were) peering over rocks as they witnessed the ultimate scene. Repeatedly the camera watched a face appear from behind a rock with an expression of puzzle-

ment, awe, or concentration revealed upon it for the audience to study. The last time I saw that sort of thing was in the old Republic serial, *King of the Rocket Men*.

The soundtrack was also put to use to manipulate us.

This is not new, nor is it reprehensible; music can have a subliminal and direct effect upon the way we experience a scene. Simply changing its tempo can change our response. Great directors have used their soundtracks skilfully. Hitchcock added an electronic shriek to the stabbing sequence in *Psycho*, for instance, to electrify the audience with horror.

But Spielberg and Williams have discovered another use for the soundtrack: generating suspense where none actually exists. It's a simple trick: early on you identify a musical theme with—say—the appearance of the UFOs or phenomena associated with them. From then on you can show placid, bucolic landscapes

and—if you play the same theme—build a sense of growing suspense and impending doom for long minutes on end during which the characters behave with blithe and banal ignorance of their slowly approaching fate.

The basic problem with *Close Encounters* is that except when the UFOs or UFO-related phenomena are on-screen, not much happens and nobody does anything interesting. That's a problem in movies built around ideas instead of characters.

BACK TO BIMONTHLY: With this issue we're back to bimonthly once more! After almost two and a half years of quarterly publication, we're back once more to six issues a year. This means we'll be able to return to two-part serials when we have something too long for one issue and too good to let go. And we've got some exciting surprises coming up in issues to come. Stay with us—you won't regret it!

—TED WHITE

Cold the Stars (cont. from page 43)

BY DAWN of the next day Jac Hackersbill was fully convinced.

That afternoon they boarded his "mountain goat" and began the long journey to Hades Central, the largest city and capital of the planet.

TWO WEEKS LATER Jac Hackersbill lay dead in a gutter. His throat had been very carefully cut. No one paid that much attention.

But Felice Stavanger was not dead. Now she was Eva Mantel, the mis-

tress of a certain Captain Pampa, a member of Breakdown Heights's most elite mercenary corps.

Sometime after that Captain Pampa came to an untimely end himself, but at that time General Rafe Cavanaugh, the commanding officer of Captain Pampa's corps, and his new bride were plotting to overthrow the government of Breakdown Heights.

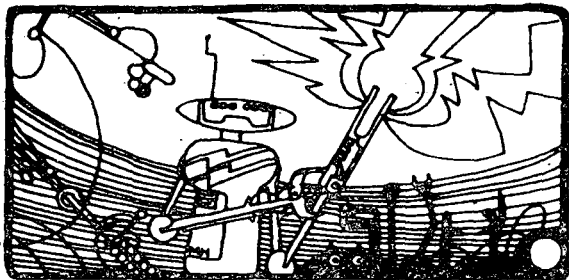
They were successful.

—RICHARD C. MEREDITH

ON SALE NOW IN JULY FANTASTIC

THE TREASURE OF ODIREX by CHARLES SHEFFIELD, THE LAST RAINBOW by PARKE GODWIN, WHAT WEIGHS 8000 POUNDS AND WEARS RED SNEAKERS?, by JACK C. HALDEMAN II, DAVIS'S FRIEND, THE HOLE, by GRANIA DAVIS, SEND US A PLANET! by DAVID R. BUNCH, PROWL, by BARRY N. MALZBERG, THE JOURNAL OF NATHANIEL WORTH, by ROBERT F. YOUNG, THE CHILL OF DISTANT LAUGHTER, by SHERWOOD SPRINGER, and many new features.

...OR SO YOU SAY



Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to Or So You Say, Box 409, Falls Church, Va. 22046.

Dear Ted White,

This is the second letter I have written to your magazine in the past six months which has astonished myself more than anyone, but comments on the content *and* the contents themselves have moved me to add my two (or three) cents worth. My first comment concerns the writings of one Steven L. Duff (of whom you are probably getting tired of hearing about) in the January 1978 issue. I entirely agree with his dismissal of Robert F. Young's story "Alec's Anab(as)is" as an "uninvolving attempt at humorous adventure". I feel AMAZING could do without this sort of trivial pseudo-story. On the other hand I entirely disagree with his refusal to admit that Barry Malzberg is (or was) a leading literary figure in the stf genre. Though Mr. Duff grudgingly admits to liking "Shibboleth" I somehow get the impression he's got a chip on his shoulder. My personal opinion of Mr. Malzberg is high—to the extent of never having read one of his stories that put me off. (I must here confess to not having read "Up-ping the Planet"). But enough of this rehashing and on with my comments on the January issue itself. January issue itself.

As your editorial comes first I'll deal with it first. I don't mind admitting that your editorials I find far more interesting and entertaining than those of Mr. Bova at *Analog*. *Analog's* editorials are nearly always dreary contemplations of political side-issues which I confess don't interest Australians very much. Your editorials make me ask if some of the back issues mentioned aren't for sale as I'd very much like to read some of those masterpieces you speak about. By the way, speaking of covers (which we weren't, but may as well), how come Steve Fabian has gotten the latest monopoly on AMAZING covers? Not that his covers aren't masterpieces, but how about another masterpiece from Ron Barber?

Which brings me to the fiction. In my last letter I enthused greatly over A. Bertram Chandler's "The Long Fall". Having read "The Sleeping Beast" though, I am drawn to comment. The story was well-written but I think this is what is known in the genre as a one-joke-throwaway. It seems he took a long time throwing it away. It just bothers me to think that this story got the cover instead of the far more deserving story by yourself and Dave Bischoff. "A Forbidden World" is as a rare jewel compared to "A World of One's Own" during which I nodded off numerous times. This latest story, on the other hand, is a true masterpiece of stf adventure. (Also, Lydia A. Moon's illustration

shows a remarkable similarity to the style of another new female stf artist—Janet Aulisio).

Christopher Anvil's "A Handheld Primer" was up to his usual excellent standard as was also seen in a previous issue with "Odds".

Stephen Tall's debut was not particularly impressive. The conclusion was obvious from the moment that Wolvem observed the approaching female. It was well-written but fell flat.

Robert Young's latest effort, "The Space Roc," somehow failed to engage my mental gears after doing so with a vengeance when I read "Chur R'hut Urr" in the June 1976 issue.

Now we come to Kevin O'Donnell's story. This man is destined for great things. I think that I have nearly every story that he ever wrote and each one is a gem. This story is also in keeping with this distinction. I'm at a loss for words to describe the ingenuity and total realism the story imbued in me. Get more stories from him, please? Talking of getting stories—how about some from John Varley, Spider Robinson, Jack Wodhams and Charles Sheffield? I realise that they have to submit them to you, but couldn't you drop a *hint*?

And now for a few constructive criticisms. Where the hell has *The Clubhouse* and *The Science in Science Fiction* gone? Inexcusable. Also, I realise AMAZING is a breakeven proposition, but when will it ever go bimonthly again? It should tell you something that while the likes of Tom Godwin, A. Bertram Chandler, Christopher Anvil, Kevin O'Donnell, Jr., and Barry Malzberg could all be selling those stories to a higher paying market like *Analogue*, *Galaxy* or *F & SF*—they're not. They're selling them to you. Despite what Mr. Duff says (I can't seem to get him off my mind—and I'm not gay), AMAZING is better than FANTASTIC, AMAZING is a competitor to the other mags and most important of all AMAZING is bloody

good.

KEVIN PHYLAND
29 Belinda Ave.
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Victoria. 3555
Australia

Yes, back issues are for sale, from the Publisher. We have returned to bimonthly, and The Clubhouse is indeed back this issue. We're working on your other requests, but I trust you've noticed by now that Charles Sheffield has been in recent issues of both AMAZING and FANTASTIC.—TW

Dear Ted;

I was pleased that you ran my letter of apology. Sure, some of the reader responses irked me, but not greatly, for I had expected such a reaction. I hadn't expected to be called a closet gay myself, as Tim McManus and Buzz Dixon insinuated. I was amused by this, if only because Buzz didn't have the balls to come up front with it.

Since those letters were written I was brought forcibly, into confined contact with gays for a stretch of three months (Navy Boot Camp). Buzz's comments to the side there were several outrageous gays. They invariably became the butt of humor for the whole company and tops on the men most to avoid list. Looking back on this I was reminded of something you said in reply to my last letter. You mentioned that the deaths of five members of the Royals was due to their life-style. This is true, just as, on one nightmarish night, I found myself alone facing seven members of a rival gang called the C-Note\$. Had it not been for my lifestyle I never would have suffered that beating. Then, isn't it equally true that the lifestyle of effeminate gays is the cause of their harassment? I can't imagine living a life as hassled as theirs. And, though it may surprise Buzz and Tim, I led no witch-hunts in Boot Camp. I also

believe the "Don't bother me and I won't bother you" philosophy, although my quick temper occasionally makes it difficult to live as completely by this as I'd like to.

And, for the record, gays aren't the only group I dislike. I also dislike whites, blacks, Christians and Buddhists. This is simply because when any group bands together, the assholes tend to become leaders (perfect examples being every president we've had since Harry Truman, The Clown Prince, to Jimmy Carter, The Grinning Fool). Groups tend to do assinine things when banded together, whites evolve the KKK, Christians do all sorts of weird, un-Christian things, like the Inquisition and the Crusades. As for blacks, well, as I was watching TV the other day, the Ritchie Family performed a ghastly song entitled "African Queens". Pardon me if at first I thought this song dealt with black homosexuals. In actuality it set out to make me believe that the Queen of Sheba, Nefertiti, and Cleopatra were all black. Well, Sumerian history is my strong point, not Egyptian, but I didn't swallow it. I know the Queen of Sheba was black and didn't look like Sophia Loren, whom I believe portrayed her in a movie. But, from Egyptian paintings I've seen, Cleopatra is portrayed as a Jewish caricature. Aside from this I do know that all Egyptian royal marriages were incestuous ones, so unless a pharaoh had poor dark relations in Ethiopia.

Well, I hope that illustrates my point. Another philosophy of mine is that people of any group must be caught alone and brought into one-on-one contact, that way you can learn their true worth, or find out if they are assholes all on their own. This philosophy isn't new, but it works. And this is the last I intend to say on this regrettably drawn out subject.

As for your latest issue, it was pretty mediocre, which is a step up.

The best story in the issue was Kevin O'Donnells "The Looking Glass of the Law." This name sounds like Barry N. Malzberg's K. M. O'Donnell pseudonym, and the story reads much like Barry. I haven't been overly kind to his stories in the past, but I was really drawn into this one. The characterization was unusually realistic and convincing for a story in AMAZING. The situation and its evolution was very thought-provoking. And if this isn't Barry, give the author my compliments.

As for "The King Is Dead, Long Live The Queen," I hereby create a new prize, The Most Guessable Shock Ending of The Year Award. It was tough to choose between this and "Two of a Kind," but this Tall tale told the whole story in the title, and even if it hadn't, the entire progression of events was obvious. There were good aspects to it, it was extremely well written and the characterization was good. This almost over-balanced the weak plot, but in my opinion the story deserved more than the author did with it.

A. Bertram Chandler ruined "The Sleeping Beast" with his cutesy-poo, pseudo-hip ending. I mean, wow, dig it, Women's Lib has entered the world of micro-circuitry! What an out of date trip!

Robert F. Young disappointed me again with his gruesomely bad "Space Roc". My faith in him remains undiminished, but of late, also unwarranted.

Somehow or other Chris Anvil's "A Handheld Primer" came off like a poor man's "Day Million". It also reminded me, even more strongly, of Damon Knight's "I See You." Other than that it was thoroughly unimpressive.

An interesting feature this issue was the interview with Hamilton and Brackett. Not surprisingly, they are among my favorite authors. To me, *City At World's End*, *Valley of Creation*, *Dreamers World*, and *Children*

of *The Sun*, all mean a great deal of fun and a much more compassionate look at the human race than one finds in modern, supposedly more humanistic work. I can think of at least one reader, fond of E. E. "Doc" Smith, who called Hamilton a hack in comparison. Smith, however, never wrote anything the stature of "What's It Like Out There?" or even "Invaders From The Monster World," a big-hearted space-opera dealing with a drug-addict main character. Readers who don't wish to believe me about Hamilton's work, need only look where the bulk of my Hamilton collection stills sits, in the pages of *Thrilling Wonder Stories* and its companion, *Startling Stories*. In the letters pages are the comments of fans, and more well-known people, such as Robert Silverberg, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and Lin Carter. In a list of the twenty four best novels that appeared in *Startling* Lin chose six by Hamilton, in a list that included such classics as Charles Harness's *The Paradox Men*, McDonald's *Wine of The Dreamers*, and Clarke's *Against The Fall of Night*.

Unfortunately, unlike his wife, Hamilton has been cruelly neglected by the sf community, as is another of *Startling's* regular contributors, Henry Kuttner. Both men represented what is so lacking today, the true storyteller. Their stories were often cerebral, but they weren't *just* cerebral, they were fine, exciting tales besides. They weren't many stories like that then, and there are fewer now. But one thing I know, Hamilton and Kuttner will be remembered long after the Delaneys are forgotten.

I must have hit a soft spot when I mentioned sales figures. I also noticed there was no subscription, when *FS&SF*, whose newsstand sales are a little poorer than yours, still sells the greater portion of its product, it looks pretty impressive. I'm not sure if magazine no-sales are handled in the same way as paperbacks where the

cover is ripped off and sent back to the publisher for a refund, but if it is, subscription sales would certainly cut into that.

I know quality has little to do with sales, how else can you explain all these number-one disco hits by nowhere groups like Earth Wind & Fire, The Bee Gees, and, oh horror, KC & The Sunshine Band? Why do they sell when groups like King Crimson, long ago and far away, never made the charts? Why do they sell when Loudon Wainwright III sings on in the background? Why, people have no taste, that's why!

Even if every story you published was as good as Charles L. Harness's "The Araqnid Window," Mark S. Geston's "The Stonghold," or George Alec Effinger's "Poets and Humans" (the latter two having appeared in *FANTASTIC*) your sales probably wouldn't be much better. Whatever happened to David R. Bunch anyway? I *liked* his work! Getting back to the point, having every cover painted by Georgia O'Keefe might not help either. If you published the science fiction equivalent of *Blood of the Bond Master*, or secured the American rights to Perry Rhodan, you could really start selling! If your cover artists painted with catsup and mustard that would be a plus too. Your way to oblivion is better, every now and then you'll turn up a story like William Nabors' "Miasmas—A Life Term", to make it seem worth while. Good luck, anyway.

STEVEN L. DUFF
1505 N. Austin Blvd.
Chicago, Illinois 60651

Henry Kutner's death in the fifties cut short a career which was still growing in stature (but even then Kuttner was recognized as a major figure in the field); Edmond Hamilton's death last year (which occurred after the interview was set in type and before it could appear on the stands) marked

the end of a long and distinguished career. Both men were giants.—TW

Dear Ted,

After scouring bookstores, el stations, and seedy newsstands for weeks trying to locate the January AMAZING, I finally picked up a ragged copy at a downtown purveyor of paperbacks. When you talked about the marketing problem, you weren't kidding! Usually I am able to find the current issues of AMAZING and FANTASTIC, owing to distribution which I think has never been better, but this time I was really stumped. I don't know what Sol Cohen and Arthur Bernhard can do about the situation, but I wish something would happen.

Steven Duff strikes again! Though I am a good friend of Steve's, I was among those who thought his first letter was largely garbage, even though it was well-written, not the usual "Charles DeVet is the greatest writer in the whole world!" which is the syndrom over at Warren. However, the reason the letter failed was, as you said, because of the way Duff said what he said, not in the actual content.

Shortly after Steve wrote it, after reflecting on the mistakes of his first correspondence, I said to him, "Look, Steve, you made a mistake writing the first letter, why put more egg on your face with all these apologies. Hell, your wordage here is almost just as derisive. Make a few short comments and leave it at that." We both laughed at the contradictory nature of the second letter, but he sent it out anyway, and here it is. The first letter had a lot of guts, even if much of it was in bad taste, but his second one strikes me as somewhat kiss-ass, despite the excellent critical points on the stories. In short, it could have been short.

Not that I'm any raging advocate of the gay movement. Here did Steve Davidson get the idea that homosexuality is not a psychological disorder;

it's still a diversion from normal male-female intercourse, yet other such diversions, as corpses, dogs, and radiator caps, strikes him as perverted. Fact is, homosexuality is becoming a social norm in today's society. Now everyone hates Anita Bryant just because she was trying to stand up for the rights of straights. I would not want a gay bar to be opened up in a residential area where a bowling alley or straight tavern would be perfectly alright. Is anyone out there going to tell me they wouldn't mind their children being exposed to homosexuality or transvestitism? At the last Emmy Awards show, Robert Blake came down strongly on Anita Bryant in his typical punk-rebel attitude. Later on in the show, he performed a short mincing routine parodying Liberace, which a few minutes later he apologized for. Blake's actions only strike me as an individual manifestation of the hypocrisy concerning homosexuality that is currently so etched upon the American consciousness. It's going to take more than a few gay-lib marches in Oakland to erase the myth of the mincing fairy from people's minds. Liberals will continue to advocate gay and minority's rights, safely ensconced in the suburbs away from the "socioeconomically savaged unfortunates."

To me homosexuality, and lesbianism, is hypocrisy in itself. After all, what is bluntly taking place is the substitution of one orifice for another. This, of course, excludes those men who perform only fellatio upon one another and those women who perform sex without artificial phallic substitutes. In all cases there is still the male-female interplay between participants, with each assuming a certain role, feminine or masculine. Much of the time the roles are pivotal. It might be safe to contend that the whole business is just plain redundant if nothing else.

Buzz Dixon's insinuations about my

friend were equally as crude as anything Duff ever wrote in his first letter. I respect Dixon for his "let alone and be left alone" philosophy as it hurts no one and allows individual pursuit of liberty. I've seen men wearing lipstick and women's wigs on Rush Street, that pastel prairie of perversion, and not once was I ever filled with the desire to go beat up on them with a baseball bat. They, after all, are making the asses out of themselves. Conversely, the gay who is subtle and doesn't display his attentions like some cheap floozy is not even annoying anyone's sensibilities. I'd rather associate with a harmless gay than a kidnapper or rapist. Dixon was just in bad taste. Maybe he felt better writing his apologetic letter to Roger Klorese; I wrote C.G. Futch a similar letter in one of my more judicial moments. Futch is no gay, and he explained the points he made on heroic fantasy quite lucidly, which I accepted. But I wrote him not because he was an alleged gay whose feelings I might have hurt, but because he was a stf fan, if we don't take care of our own, who will? I wouldn't dream of requesting another letter of apology from Mr. Dixon for Steve. I can hear his brash mental thunderings even now. Dixon made his point. He was wrong. Let him bask in his own ignorance.

Recently I listened to a radio program concerning the problem of homosexual rape in American penal institutions. Apparently the rate is higher than ever before, thanks to the iron-clad security in state and local prisons. Mexican institutions have long practiced conjugal visits with their charges, and it works. There is such a low number of homosexual rapes in these prisons as to be totally invisible next to ours. And we talk about how American sophiscation. As I listened to the program, phone call after phone from abused convicts and ex-cons were broadcast. All these men had suffered the agony and humilia-

tion of being "sissified" in jail, yet their misfortunes were not indictments against the gay community, but against the apathy of guards and warders and the general laxity of security. It is my belief that anyone is capable of becoming a homosexual given proper conditions and chain of events in the person's life, no matter how strong the prejudices. So it is not really fair for us to jeer and decry. "There," but for the grace of God, lies me. . .

The open-minded attitude on gays can somehow be correlated to modern fiction. With the raging days of involvement gone, we have turned more into ourselves in attempting to find out who we are, and not finding the indentity of any abstract cause or movement. In doing so we have become more apathetic and alienated from our fellow man. The New Wave is a popular indicator of this, because it is largely so personalized, extravagant, and many times frivolous. Here is a quote from a speech Mason W. Gross made before the National Book Committee on November 18, 1959:

"We hope to persuade people to the wider and wiser use of books. If we are currently failing to persuade them it is because our authors are failing to persuade their readers of the importance and significance of whatever they say in their books. To be successful in this campaign therefore, we must recapture in our new books that sense of excitement which comes when somebody who believes something deeply and sincerely is trying with all the eloquence at his command to convert the particular audience that he had in mind. He needs to be unafraid to speak out, to speak out clearly and plainly, to advocate what he believes. I am beginning to think that a cold war is not only a war in which there seems to be a disposition to fight but no actual fighting is going on, but also a war in which there is very little battling of ideas. The very presence of danger seems to have

frightened us into silence, and from that we drift into apathy. Books can arouse us from this apathy. In fact, it is one of their principal missions to do so. In this way may lie our national salvation."

So, a speech made at the end of the turbulent McCarthy era, when we were still unsure of ourselves, a chilling portent of things to come. The Beatles cult was a manifestation of this, since the fab four's music was only a pop-diluting of the raw blues, packaged for middle-class consumption. While they enjoyed phenomenal success, bands like the Rolling Stones and the Animals suffered because they made no attempt to smother the roots of their music with rosy flowers. In the world of literature, we can see why Phillip Farmer was so grossly ignored for such a long time, because he has always spoke directly and meaningfully about the *truth*. I too, read *Fire in the Night* (I own it!), and while I contend it's a might preachy in spots (Look at me, Muhhumad using the adze of my pen to chip away at the mountain!), there is no denying its brutal reality, its eloquence, its brilliant reflection of human emotions on several levels. But would it have had any chance competing against *Roots*? And would Alex Hailey have made so much money, even though he justly deserves it for the sweat and guts he put into the book, if he had been white? I doubt it. American whites would not have allowed one of their own to fling dirt in the face of their race, and blacks would have regarded the book as "jus' another honkie slummin' to make some bread off us po' black folks." All of us are afraid of the truth, because of our very nature, the truth is usually bad.

There are still writers with conviction left, but they are few and far between. And there are no Londons, no Faulkners, no Steinbecks. Because these men survived without the need to be telegraphed by sententious critics and similar auctorial parasites;

they believed in their work, and knew by their sincerity that readers, once having read, would believe, too. Call me a sentimentalist, but that's what I believe.

Every now and then I discover a new author that really impresses me. L. Sprague deCamp was on. After reading "Priapus" and "the Figurine", I hunted through my sf collection and read as many Willie Newberry tales as I could, both in *FANTASTIC* and *F & SF*. I really kicked myself when I found out Harold Shea was a character in a series by de Camp and Fletcher Pratt. Regarding my discovery, I could see how ignorant my dismissal of Harold Shea fantasies was. So I bought *The Complete Enchanter*.

I think we'll get back to stories, real stories. Bernard Malamud once said, "In recreating the humanity of man, in reality his greatness, he will, among other things, hold up the mirror to the mystery of himself, in which poetry and possibility live, though he had endlessly betrayed them."

The poetry and possibility exist in the field of stf. If its writings be solidly generic, then fine.

I'm proud to be a fan.

DENNY DALEY
Chicago, Ill
December 1977

One reason I've let this discussion of homosexuality continue in these pages is to air the stereotypes and confusion which so many of you hold on the subject. But I must point out that Anita Bryant is not standing up "for the rights of straights." She is waging a holy war on homosexuals, citing the Bible to prove her points against them. She would be happier if every homosexual in this country either disappeared or "found Jesus" and went straight. I don't consider this a defense of the rights of non-homosexuals, unless you feel that rights for

homosexuals would deprive non-homosexuals of their rights—a far-fetched notion indeed. The basic problem here is one of individual rights: does someone have the right to his or her own sexual preferences (whatever they may be) or must everyone be forced into a socially sanctioned mold? Are our sexual preferences the business of anyone but ourselves, in the privacy of our own personal lives? Anti-homosexual bias has a way of striking at the lives of non-homosexuals as well—as in the persecution/prosecution of married couples for “illegal” sex acts within their own homes—the so-called Sodomy Acts which remain law in many states banning oral sex, anal sex, etc. Either we practice the principles embodied in our Constitution or we sacrifice them, one by one, to the Anita Bryants of this world. Today the homosexuals. Tomorrow—you? As for homosexual rape in prisons, odd you should mention that. Almost all such rapes are committed by men who are heterosexual on the outside (and macho in their attitudes) against weaker men, men perceived as effeminate, and/or recognized homosexuals. Raping a homosexual or forcing him into oral sex is regarded by such men as proof of their “masculinity.” As long as they take the active role in the act they can maintain their self-image as “not queer.” These same men are the kind who beat up gays on the outside. They are, in fact, a reflection of the culture of which Anita Bryant approves. Ironical, eh?—TW

Dear Ted,

It finally happened; . . . Or So You Say contained enough incentive for my writing a letter. I must congratulate you on this, since AMAZING has one of the only correspondence columns that does not abase itself with the continuous drivel of complimentary letters.

The enticement that brought this letter into existence, is the remark by

Steve Davidson on homosexuality in the January 78 issue. I was taken aback by his statement that homosexuality is not a perversion. Being French-Canadian, I came to doubt my mastery of what is to me a second language. Although some words are practically identical in both tongues, they sometimes have subtle differences in their definitions. In this case the English spelling is identical to the French. So I dug out my old Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary and soon found the puzzling word. To my great relief Merriam reestablished my faith as to the control of the English tongue from a Latin perspective. The 1961 definition is:

“per-verse, n. 1. Act of perverting, or process of being perverted; diversion to a wrong end or use; also, a perverted or corrupted form of something. 2. Psychopathol. A maladjustment of the sexual life, such that satisfaction is sought in aberrant ways.”

The only way you could exclude homosexuality from that definition, would be to say that it is a normal way to attain sexual gratification. I rely on nature to provide me with a definition of normal, otherwise we might as well include any whim of the subconscious as normal. Every article I ever read dealing with Zoology or Botany, stressed the fact that only the fittest survived; natural selection preserved the best points of a race, thus retaining the better qualities for posterity. The inability of the Gays to reproduce themselves, seems to defeat the plans of nature. If everyone was Gay we would have to institute compulsory copulation laws, between men and women, so as to insure the survival of the species (might make an interesting plot to a story). In the same way, if everyone became an ascetic monk there would be no more human race. Both may be then included in the same bag, as it may be argued that these saintly persons are prey to masochistic tendencies.

Perhaps it would be the Christian thing to do if we all closed our eyes to their deviation, and accepted the aberration in the realm of the normal. It would ease any shame or other complexes relating to their condition, thus permitting them to feel more comfortable in our society. Still it would be an illusion, as a cripple cannot make himself normal by simply thinking it. Try as we may we still feel queasy in the presence of badly deformed or amputated individuals, as we feel sorry for them and cringe at seeing ourselves in their position. Similarly as we accept the malformed and damaged individuals in our midst, we should tolerate the different, if it does not arm the society that harbors it.

That ends my discourse on that subject as I would like to take the opportunity to comment on other aspects of the magazines. First I would like to state that I will not bother commenting on the stories as I feel it would be useless. Unless the comments were directed to a mature discussion of the plot and style used in a story, for it would be a waste of time to try and influence your future choice of stories by unrestrained praise or criticism. You choose the tales according to your taste, and the success of a magazine, to a certain degree, depends on that taste being compatible with a substantial number of readers. Thus it should be, for if you tried to cater to the majority of fans by guessing what they want, you would ultimately fail. The success of an editor is linked to a natural communion with the likings of the average fan.

In keeping with what I said before, I should mention that I am perhaps, perverted, since I prefer AMAZING to *Analog*. According to the circulation figures you mentioned in the January issue, it would appear the *normal* fan prefers the latter. Perhaps I'm pushing the analogy too far, as it would perhaps be more appropriate to compare different tastes in S.F. to the pref-

erence of some men to women with certain attributes, i.e.: blond hair, big breasts, etc. . . It does not mean that women lacking these quirks of nature are inferior. Nor does it mean that men who prefer less-endowed women are perverted, as copulating with them would still propagate the race. Whoops, I guess I'm digressing. Getting back to AMAZING, in view of recurring financial problems, it should perhaps be contemplated to raise the price to \$1.25 as *Analog* and *Galaxy* did. I'm sure that the majority of people would not mind paying a little extra to better the chances of AMAZING surviving. (The fact that I already took out a two year subscription does not influence my opinion. I think?) Finally I thought I'd mention, for whatever good it might do, that I liked "Two Of A Kind". I can't understand why it upset so many people. (Does that make me perverted?)

Anyway that's all I have to say, and hope you will continue to print controversial letters so as to stir the more lethargic readers.

Sincerely yours,

DONALD LEGAULT
17 Le Roy
Touraine, Gatineau
Province of Quebec
Canada J8V 1G6

Dear Mr. White,

I hope that by now you will have received many other letters protesting about "Social Blunder" by Tom Godwin, in the July (1977) issue of AMAZING.

The stupid, murderous feud between the English and the Irish is about as humorous and as whimsically endearing as cancer of the womb.

DAVID WATKINS
(Welsh, thank God!)

Tre Lales
Penybont-Ar-Ogwr

Morgannwg CF32 OLD
United Kingdom

Oddly enough, yours is the first.—TV

"I think there is more promise, more future for the entire field [in UNEARTH] than there is in any other magazine now being published."

— Theodore Sturgeon

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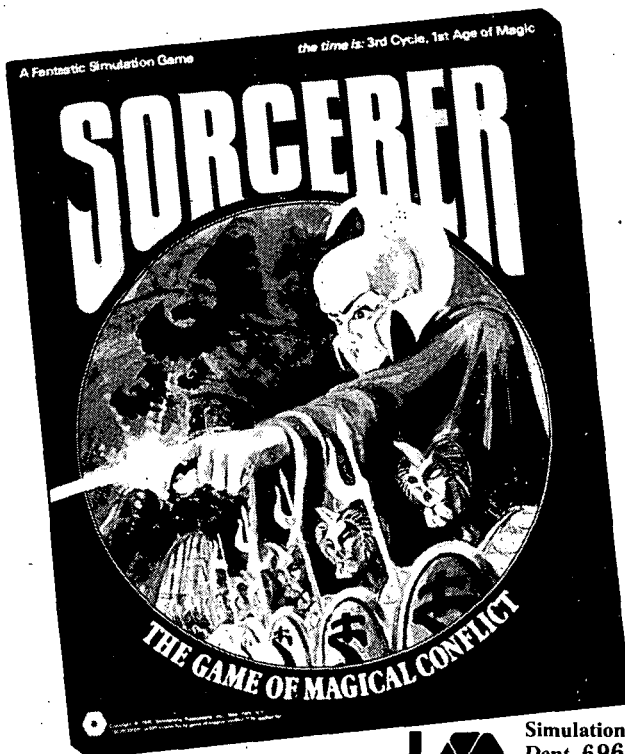
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